



**SAM CHAND
LEADERSHIP
INSTITUTE**

Leadership Essentials

**Indispensable Tools for
Effective Influence**



**SAM
CHAND**

Leadership Essentials:
Indispensable Tools for Effective Influence
by Sam Chand
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INTRODUCTION

EVERY LEADER HAS A TOOLBOX of skills and competencies that he or she develops over the course of the leadership journey. Without them, we stagnate in our effectiveness and then become frustrated that our businesses, churches and organizations are lacking in vitality. In reality, we are the ones hindering progress, whether because of comfort in our apparent success or diminishing self-awareness of our weaknesses.

In this book, I've distilled principles surrounding ten of the key areas every leader must develop, from communication and focus to choosing a team and passing the baton to the next generation. These chapters are intended to be launchpads to deeper study and reflection as you commit to growing your capacity to carry out the vision God has given you.

CHAPTER 1

CHOOSING YOUR TEAM

A LEADER IS ONLY AS SUCCESSFUL as the team he or she chooses to join them in carrying out the vision. In selecting and developing a team, I have identified five qualities I'd insist on. There are others I'd like to see and that I would hope for. But these are the essentials.

STRENGTH

They have to be strong. By that, I mean they must be people who can handle instruction and criticism, with whom I can use plain language and not have to walk on eggshells and fix things for them. That means that if they need to be corrected in certain areas, they can change them without my having to worry about how much I'm going to hurt their feelings. I must have people around me who

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can handle instructions in two to three words and be able to carry them out quickly.

ATTENTIVENESS

They need to be able to pay attention, be alert to what I'm saying and absorb it quickly. I don't want to give them the same lessons repeatedly. We don't have to chase after attentive people repeatedly. They understand the first time.

FAITHFULNESS

I learned very early in my own leadership journey that if my team aren't faithful to me—if they aren't committed to the same vision I am—they'll abandon me. The worst thing is that they run away, not before I start and not when I explain what I want. They nod, smile, and agree, but as soon as I'm fifteen feet away, they abandon me.

I need people who remain by my side no matter how difficult things become. They don't need my constantly reassuring them, "You're doing a great job. You're wonderful." They're steady and I know I can count on them.

FIRMNESS

By firmness I mean not exploited by manipulative people. In every church and corporation there are manipulative types. Al Qaeda terrorists aren't new—only the name. Terrorism in the church is nothing new, but it's usually cloaked in ecclesiastical language, hidden in the by-laws, or made to sound spiritual and appealing. The ultimate goal of such "terrorists" is control and destruction.

They may speak in pious language such as, “The Holy Spirit led me,” or say, “The Lord spoke to my heart.” They may be extremely self-deceived or just mean-spirited. It doesn’t matter which, because the end is the same. They want to destroy the present plans and operations. This is what I call seductive manipulation.

Instead, here are three important characteristics to develop in our teams:

1. If we disagree with our leader we don’t do so publicly. We need to discuss it with that person in private.
2. If we disagree, we ought to search our motives before we speak. We need to be sure that others don’t set us up. They won’t speak up themselves, but they will find naive and trusting souls to do the work for them.
3. If we disagree, we should be sure we don’t do it for personal gain.

LOYALTY

I do not mean they must agree all the time. Loyalty doesn’t mean repeating, “Yes, yes, yes,” no matter what the visionary says. The following three sentences explain what I mean:

1. You may disagree with my head but not my heart.
2. You may disagree with how I do things but not why I do things.
3. You may disagree with my methods but not my motivations.

PASTOR OR CEO

When I first went to Beulah Heights Bible College as president in 1989, I didn’t have a background in human resources. Over the

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years I've learned a few lessons that might be helpful to those who hire and fire. These principles carry through in other leadership situations as well. Almost any week in the year, I have conversations with pastors who have problems with paid staff. They have a difficult job today. On one hand, they are pastors—that means they're shepherds who care for the sheep. On the other hand, they are the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and the congregation holds them responsible for the smooth running business of the church.

The first thing I've learned is that *even though they are both pastor and CEO, they can't be both at the same time*. I try to help them understand the difference between the two and when to give priority to one and when to the other.

It may help if I explain it this way. Let's say I'm the senior minister at First Spiritual Church. To every paid staff member, I am the CEO first and the pastor second. That means I must first do the business of the church with them. When I have accomplished that, I can function as their pastor. If I get the order wrong, I am in trouble and so is the organization.

To every church member, I am the pastor first and the CEO second. I must be able to reach out to them as those who need to be nurtured, strengthened, encouraged, rebuked, and disciplined. When I've performed my pastoral duties, I can function as the CEO. If I get this wrong, then it's back to the matter of putting projects before people. If I see the members only as the means to accomplish what I want done, then I'll manipulate, threaten, coerce, or flatter them into fulfilling my agenda.

When I function as CEO with paid employees, the first lesson I learn is that I hire people for *what* they know; I fire them for *who* they are. What do we do when it's time to put someone on staff? My suggestion is that we need to re-think our policy. We want

competent people, obviously. But when we select a team, we need to spend more time with who they are rather than what they know.

I can read their resumés and I can talk to people they've worked for and with. That is important. But I also know that troubles in the job usually start over personality issues and not over competency. Once hired, they will give me joy or grief. With few exceptions, the people I have fired I have terminated because of their attitudes. Rarely have I had to get rid of someone for lack of ability to do the job.

This leads me to the second lesson I've learned: *Hire slowly and fire quickly*. It's better to have a vacancy than to have bad help. Suppose the doctor diagnoses you with cancer, says surgery is the only option, and asks, "When would you want it scheduled?"

I'm guessing you'll say, "As soon as possible."

As a leader, a good question to ask ourselves is this, *Why do I tolerate incompetent staff? Why do I allow them to infect the rest of the staff with their bad attitude?* Here is the way I like to say it: Don't rush hiring decisions; don't delay firing decisions.

The third lesson I've learned is this: *The best time to fire somebody is the first time it goes through your head*. We tend to get our roles confused again here. Instead of thinking as a CEO and for the good of the organization, we tend to switch to our pastoral role and figure out ways to excuse or overlook problems serious enough that we'd consider terminating them.

I've also learned that if the situation is serious enough to fire people and we don't, we soon begin to search for reasons to keep them.

About the time I figured out this third lesson, I spotted an advertisement in *USA Today* by Randall Murphy, the founder and president of the Acclivus Corporation. I don't know much

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about Acclivus except that their clients include major organizations such as Dunn and Bradstreet, Exxon, Mobile, Dell, FedEx, Dr. Pepper/Seven-Up and Roadway Express. The ad read: “When you are assigned the task of taking the hill—or the market—you are less concerned about who is *for* you and more concerned about who is *with* you.”

Just because people say, “I’m for you,” that isn’t the real issue. The real issue is what happens in their lives. Do they do what they promise? Do they faithfully follow their words by their actions?

THREE LEVELS OF LADDER HOLDERS

I often use the metaphor of ladder holders to describe the teams that leaders select and develop to help them carry out their vision. I’ve already mentioned the five things we have to watch for that tell us who those ladder holders are. Next, I want to explore the three levels of ladder holders.

First, there are the *followers*.

This word can refer to everybody in the congregation, business or organization.

Second are the *ministers*. They feel God has called them, empowered them, and gifted them to serve. When I use the word minister, I don’t mean ordained ministers and pastors, although it may include them—I refer to all of those who have a heart to serve others.

Third are *leaders*. They not only have a sense of calling; they also have passion—and that passion is to see God work through others. True leaders don’t try to deceive themselves into thinking they can or even want to do everything. They’re willing to empower

and trust others. Ministers do service primarily by themselves; leaders do service through others.

TRAINING LADDER HOLDERS

This leads me to emphasize that ladder holders need to be *trained*. Very few leaders have qualified and trained ladder holders. I've held conversations with pastors of large churches and organizational leaders all over this country. I point out the qualities I've already mentioned. They need people who are strong, attentive, faithful, firm, and loyal.

Then I say, "Name your ladder holders. I'm not asking for positions and titles such as deacons or trustees. Think about those five qualities I gave you." I pause and then say, "Tell me the names of your ladder holders."

No matter how many times I've done this, the highest anybody has been able to name is five. The size of the congregation or business doesn't seem to matter. When the leaders can't get beyond a few names, it tells me that they have done an excellent job of raising followers but has been abysmal about doing leadership development.

Developing people takes time, and time is one thing we don't have in our busy lives. I also remind leaders that their armor bearers or assistants may not necessarily be ladder holders. Just because somebody has an impressive title doesn't make him or her a trusted ladder holder.

To make this clear, I try to get leaders to think of situations when their church or organization is filled with problems and ask, "To whom would you turn for help?" They still stare at me

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in confusion, so here's an illustration that has seemed to make clear what I mean.

“Let's say you are marooned on an island. The battery on your cell phone is running low. You decide you have just enough juice to make one call. Let's also say that you know that no member of your family is available.” Then I pause and ask, “Whom will you call?”

They easily eliminate the ones they wouldn't call, and some of them are prominent in the church or organization. They finally realize that they need to call a true ladder holder—a person who is faithful and someone who is committed to them personally. Those are the individuals who will do whatever necessary to get them off the island.

CHAPTER 2

STAYING FOCUSED

IT'S PERFECTLY NORMAL for your focus to shift. When it happens, be honest with yourself. There are some of you who might be in ministry now who might need to either return to—or perhaps enter—the business world because you'll have a greater Godly influence there. Some of you might be going from the secular arena into ministry. Both are valid shifts. It's important to remember that you are *always* in ministry regardless of where you are. No one should narrowly define full-time ministry only as leaving a secular job to go preach somewhere. Was Paul any less of an apostle when he was making tents?

Maybe you've heard friends or acquaintances in the ministry say things like, "I wish I could go back to developing houses," "I dream about going back into the banking industry," or "I really want to take a new opportunity in sales." Many times, when pastors say

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things like this, they're viewing these moves as regressive. However, that's not always the case. Making a transition doesn't have to be regressive; it can be a step into freedom.

There are many leaders who feel trapped where they are, who let themselves be governed by circumstances and situations, even though God may be opening another door for them. If you're sensing that God might be making a shift in your life, go ahead and catch that wave. Keep your focus, trust God to provide, and ensure your freedom by making sure that all of your dealings are conducted with Godly integrity.

In this chapter, we'll examine the ways that God might be leading you, talk about how to handle your shifting passions, and share how you can maintain your focus.

DISCOVERING HOW GOD GUIDES YOU

For Moses, it was a burning bush. For the Apostle Paul, it was an experience on Damascus Road. For Joseph, it was an understanding of dreams. God speaks to each of us differently, communicating His message in different ways. That's why it's important to know how God tends to speak to you.

Tim Elmore, president of growingleaders.com, talks about different ways that God speaks to his servants. Here are the five major methods God uses to speak to us:

- » Being called from birth
- » A thunderbolt
- » Open doors
- » Growing awareness
- » Obedience to a Scriptural mandate

Being **called from birth** is defined in Jeremiah 1:5, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I set you apart.” Jesus, John the Baptist, and the prophet Jeremiah are just some examples of people who were set apart by God at an early age. When God sent a **thunderbolt** to Saul on Damascus Road, it changed his life’s direction.

One of the ways that God speaks to me is through **open doors**. When I sense that seizing an opportunity would please the Lord, I simply do it. If the situation doesn’t work out, I know I can always end it. However, I won’t know which way the opportunity will go unless I say “yes.” **Growing awareness** is another way in which I receive guidance.

Some leaders are simply led through their **obedience to a Scriptural mandate**. Knowing that they should be feeding the poor, caring for the sick, or preaching the good news is all the guidance that some leaders need. For example, someone once asked Mother Teresa when she was called to minister in Calcutta. She responded, “I was never called. I saw a need and thought I could help.”

Regardless of how He speaks to you—whether it’s one method or a combination—God knows the most effective way to communicate His plan to you. Some of it has to do with your personality. Some people are just more attuned to subtleties, which means they’ll respond to a growing awareness. Others might need to get whacked by a divine sledgehammer or a hit with thunderbolt. The more intense your personality, the more direct God has to be with you.

Think back to the times in your life when God has guided you. How has He communicated? While God is certainly not limited, chances are that He’ll use similar means now. And once He

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provides the guidance you need, it will be an anchor that will keep you stable through tough times and during difficult days.

HANDLING INTERNAL SHIFTS

Sometimes, leaders experience restlessness or may intuitively recognize that things are about to change before they can even articulate what they're sensing. They struggle simply because their leadership gifts enable them to sense change before others see it.

Because navigating these ambiguous changes can involve so many unknowns, it's important that you have some constants, some things that are non-negotiable. That's where your value system comes in. Even in the midst of change, you must always know that some things cannot be negotiated.

In addition to involving your faith, navigating internal shifts also relies heavily upon your intuition. Don't underestimate the importance of your intuition in navigating these internal changes. God will use your intuition to speak to you. For example, let's say you were talking with a fellow leader who was telling you about the new areas that he wants to move into. In the process, you learn that he's planning to totally discard everything that God had done in his life until then. Wouldn't your intuition flash a warning sign?

It's your intuition that tells you that whatever shifting is going on will enhance the wisdom and experience that God has enabled you to accumulate over the years. It's your intuition that enables you to see how God is building upon your experiences to expand your ministry, to take you to different places. It's your intuition that will keep you from heading into dangerous places—like ignoring the legacy and values that God has established in your life.

When Bill Hybels talks about the intuitive leader, he describes someone who picks up on things from the inside, at a gut level. He reminds us of the Old Testament story where David knew God was moving by listening for the breeze ruffling the leaves of the mulberry tree (2 Samuel 5:22). When we talk about intuition, we're talking about listening to the subtleties of what God is saying in our hearts. God wants to lead us; He doesn't want to force us.

Unfortunately, experience is often the enemy of intuition. When you've been in ministry and leadership for a while, it's easy for your intuitive sensors to become corroded, for you to begin brushing things off. All day long, people are giving you ideas or sharing their pain. It's often too easy to become calloused and cynical.

Here are some ideas that will help you to keep your antenna up so that you can intuitively hear the subtleties of God:

- » Get a prayer life
- » Invest in stillness
- » Be clear about what's important

MAINTAINING YOUR FOCUS

Being productive while you're navigating personal change is difficult. While your heart may be yearning for a different place, you still have services to conduct and duties to perform. It's the daily demands of ministry that cause many leaders to simply ignore their own shifting passions and press on. Rather than stuffing what we're feeling, we need to respond with wisdom and courage. To do that, we need the support and encouragement of trusted friends.

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OUR EXPERIENCES

Please don't hesitate to talk with your friends. If they're good friends, they'll welcome the opportunity to discuss your situation. In fact, your friends are probably already witnessing the subtle shifts you may think you're keeping so well hidden. If they come to you before you approach them, don't be threatened; welcome them in openness.

During World War II, our intelligence people used multiple points to determine where a radio signal originated. By triangulating these signals, they could figure out where an enemy target was. Today, our friends can help us to distinguish whether the signals we're getting are something new that God is saying to us, or whether it's just a tough time that we need to walk through.

Too often, people let situations determine their destiny. We all know that pastors are not immune to this. Rather than reacting to situations, we can get wisdom by following the Scriptural principle of submitting to others (Ephesians 5:21). Submission has to be a quality found in every leader. In his series on Dynamic Deliverers, Jack Hayford describes how even after Moses received his charge from God at the burning bush, he submitted his experience and his plans to his father-in-law, his wife and his brother. Every leader needs to have that balance; we need others to help us determine if what we're hearing is just us, if it's a bad time in our life, or we've just walked into "a God moment."

Maintaining our focus is also easier when we're concentrating on positives rather than negatives. Focus is the key to all ministry. Like the Apostle Paul, we should be able to say, "This one thing I do" (Philippians 3:13). When we are sensing upcoming transitions, it should be because God is enlarging our vision, because the love

for a new direction growing within us is eclipsing our love for where we are. It should be because God is expanding our mission and skill set, not because we've become weary in well doing or because we're responding to something negative about where we are.

It's vital that we're honest with ourselves about our motives. All leadership comes from the heart and people always respond to the heart of a leader. If they sense the heart of a shepherd, they'll be drawn to your leadership. That's why 1 Peter talks about not leading grudgingly or out of necessity (5:2). We have to do what we do willingly. Too many times, we stay in a position out of necessity simply because we need a paycheck. If your heart is not in what you're doing, integrity requires that you move on.

Maintaining your integrity is an essential part of navigating a personal transition. We've all heard of people in business who are only treading water until a better opportunity comes along, who are biding their time until retirement, or about folks who show up for work each day while their hearts and minds are elsewhere. There's no doubt that this type of behavior can harm a business. When this behavior comes from a church leader, the results can be devastating.

This disparity in results is easily explained. In the business world, what you produce is tied to *what you do*. Business leaders produce cheaper products, better products, or higher service. In the church, leaders reproduce *who they are*. The church is about character, it's about integrity, and it's about your heart. If a leader's heart is elsewhere, what are they reproducing?

Deciding to pull the trigger can be scary. However, if you're moving in faith and discerning a shift that's of God, you can trust that He has every detail planned.

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Integrity also requires that we transition our position in order. We should focus on performing our duties to the best of our ability and easing the transition of whoever succeeds us. It might involve selecting or mentoring a successor. Our goal should always be to leave our current organization in better condition than it was in when we arrived, with healthy people that we've prepared to carry on God's work.

None of us needs to feel trapped in our current situation. If God is enlarging our vision, we can depend upon Him to lead us. When He is calling to our hearts to shift lanes, we can trust Him to make our path clearer. It's going to require faith, but the result of that faith will conform us into the brightness of His image.

CHAPTER 3

DISCERNING THE TIMES

FOUR QUESTIONS LOOM before leaders today—What? Why? How? and When?—and leaders have to answer each of them. Furthermore, they need to know which one to answer first and in what order to answer the others. Too many leaders respond to the wrong questions and in the wrong order. In so doing, they come up with ineffective answers.

Effective leaders know that two of the four questions take priority. The question leaders choose to answer first tells us much about their attitudes and methods. I use the term *futuring leaders* to refer to leaders who are able to discern the times and possess a firm vision of where they want to go in the future. Consequently, *futuring leaders* first answer *What?* Then they ask *Why?*

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By answering these two questions first, they begin to define the direction in which their organization should go and to form a process to get them headed in that direction. Since their search for answers has a direct relationship to the mission and vision of the institution, they need to define their problem areas. The question *What?* does exactly that.

“What is the challenge before us?” futuring leaders must first ask. Their question may take various forms, but it will lead them to ask and answer others. Once they discover the solution, they will seek options to implement the *what*. Once they have decided on *what*, they are ready to move on to the second question: *Why?* They need to understand the reason they are taking a particular step. Thus they ask, “Why are we doing this?”

When I asked one pastor why his congregation had chosen to underwrite a particular program, he stared at me for several seconds.

“Everyone knows why,” he said. “The answer is obvious even to people who don’t know the message of salvation.” He spoke to me as if I were a child.

I just smiled. But what if I had answered, “I don’t know why.” Would he have explained? Or would he have sneered at my stupidity?

Or wasn’t I really stupid?

This leads me to ask, *Do we have the right to assume that everyone in our organization knows why leadership chooses to do a certain thing?* I doubt it. For instance, a pastor makes a big push for increased evangelism. From his perspective some of the answers to why would be:

- » We can win more people to Jesus Christ.
- » We’ll have more people in the church.

- » We'll have more money to expand our church programs.
- » We'll have a greater influence in the community.

His list of why answers may not be the same as that of the congregation he's trying to lead.

By thinking of others' reasons, fears, and needs, futuring leaders can understand the resistance and either rethink their own purposes or find ways to get into others' frames of reference. They also avoid inevitable conflict because they have already prepared for and overcome most of the hindrances.

Once leaders have asked and answered *What?* and *Why?* they're ready to move on to the next two questions: *How?* and *When?* This second set of questions implies action. It's as if we're saying, "We've made the decision to act. Now we need to figure out how to go about accomplishing our goal and determine when we can implement our plan."

Again, here is where many leaders miss out. They need to be aware that implementing the *how* and *when* means change. I like to think of it this way: If we think differently, we'll see differently. How we think shapes the actions we choose.

The greatest challenge facing leaders is making executive decisions from a variety of different viewpoints. Sometimes we make decisions from the perspective of management or maintenance. At other times we have operated from a fix-it point of view. Rarely have we pulled in all those who will be involved by the changes and said, "You are part of this change in procedure. Your job may be to answer the telephone, but even that is a vital ingredient in this program."

Here's another way to look at the same issue. Let's compare the difference between old leadership styles and new leadership styles, or "futurefaith" thinking. In the old style—and I refer

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primarily to the methods used prior to the end of the twentieth century—leaders studied the past and understood the way things operated in 1959 or 1989. When they moved into 2000, they made a few changes—that is, they adapted to what was going on—but mainly they replicated what they and others had done in the past. Because they made a few adaptations, they called that progress.

“What did they do back then?” was the primary question used to help them cope in the present. In contrast to the old style, the new leadership peers into the future, pauses, thinks about the present, and asks:

- » What’s going to happen in the future?
- » How can we position ourselves in the present to be ready to move into the future?
- » How can we design a program for what lies ahead?

Futurefaith leaders get their answers by looking at such factors as demographics and economic growth. They use those answers to shape the present and guide them toward the future.

PRESERVING THE PAST OR SHAPING THE FUTURE?

Too often, however, leaders still caught up in preserving the attitudes and traditions that prevailed thirty years ago don’t know how to look at the future. For too long, those in every level of leadership have taken a reactive posture, resulting in attitudes and vision usually lagging about ten years behind industry and technology. Church leaders could move ahead by simply asking: “As a local congregation and as witnesses of Jesus Christ, what are our needs? What are the needs we see around us that we

can help to meet? What kinds of needs will we need to meet in the years ahead?”

As we form answers, we need to remind ourselves that most of our constituents live in a highly technological world six days a week. Even in 1997, how many people would have envisioned having their own web site? Yet today a website is a necessity—whether you lead a business, organization or church.

Futurefaith leaders should know this: We need to use technology.

I like to think of the present situation in the church as being much like the use of a remote control. These days most families have that little battery-operated mechanism for running TVs, DVRs and DVD players. People have become so accustomed to remotes that even when they leave home, they take mental remotes with them. They’re still using those remotes even when they attend church. They stare at the strange building that doesn’t look like anything except a church. It has stained-glass windows on the outside, perhaps a bell, and certainly a steeple. Suddenly and unconsciously, “click-click” goes the remote, and they say to themselves, “How does this relate to me? Why should I listen? Is this real life?”

Perhaps they do come inside and sit in a pew—an uncomfortable piece of furniture used nowhere else today except in church buildings. They sit down and listen to pastors who preach the same sermons in content and length that they preached ten years ago.

“This is the answer!” the preachers cry out. “This is the way to [salvation, growth, healing, prosperity, or peace].” They have a number of specific answers to handle each problem that confronts the local congregation, the church at large, and society in general. Unfortunately for those preachers, they haven’t figured out that

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some of those problems aren't so answerable and directions aren't as clear as they once were.

“Click-click” and the remote switches to another mental channel.

FROM THE ABSOLUTE TO THE AMBIGUOUS

We have moved from a world of the absolute to the ambiguous. We're asking ethical questions that people haven't asked before; for example:

- » Fifty years ago, how many committed Christians married outside their denomination? Who worries about that today?
- » Twenty years ago, how many churches acknowledged that some marriages between believers didn't last until parted by death?
- » In Mama's church, how many members seriously debated issues such as euthanasia or sexual reassignment?
- » A generation ago, how many Christians expressed concern about the environment, practiced recycling, or questioned whether we would have enough fossil fuels for our grandchildren's generation?
- » When I was a boy, I heard Christians scream out against cremation, but who fights that issue today?

Futurefaith leaders have moved from answering questions that nobody asks anymore to discussing the nittygritty issues of life that concern and confuse people. Society has changed; we have lost the stability our parents and grandparents enjoyed and took for granted.

Futuring pastors no longer preach forty-five-minute sermons, because they know the remotes are clicking away, and they would

be tuned out before they had preached even thirty minutes. In fact, maybe sermons need to be done in snippets—points interspersed with songs, Bible readings, dramas, and video clips. Someone said we need to think of the modern sermon as “Karaoke preaching,” in which the preacher stands in the middle of the congregation like an interactive television talk show host. The futuring church must find new ways of presenting the gospel before they’re tuned out by the ever-present mental remotes.

THINKING IN NEW WAYS

To move into the futurefaith mentality, church leaders have to accept one important reality: Most worship services are patterned after practices of a century ago, and those methods no longer attract people to the faith.

Futuring leaders must move into a thinking-leading style of leadership in which they see relationships and possibilities that still elude others. This is the idea I had in mind once when I spoke to a group of pastors. “The greatest challenge is not your location. It is not your finances, and it is not your staff,” I said. “The greatest challenge is your thinking. If you can change your way of thinking, you can change everything.” I reminded them that we’re in a thinking era and we have to question everything. In the past, we continued to do things a certain way because that was the way the leaders before us operated. That plan no longer works.

Futuring leaders question everything.

- » “Why are we doing this?”
- » “Are we still doing that?”
- » “Is that the best way to use our resources?”

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- » “Is there a better way to do this?”
- » “Why is she still doing that?”
- » “Is he competent to do this?”

1 Chronicles 12:32 describes men from the tribe of Issachar who “understood the times and knew what Israel should do.” The church and the world need more leaders like these, who are aware of the present, look to the future and combine discernment with action.

CHAPTER 4

BUILDING SYSTEMS & STRUCTURES

WHEN I TALK TO PEOPLE who have been leading for a long time, I notice many of them are frustrated. Business leaders may tell me, “We have good products and a good sales team. Our manufacturing is doing well, and our warehouse gets products out on time. I can’t understand why our company isn’t growing faster.” Similarly, pastors confide, “We have a talented worship team, people say they like my messages, and we have plenty of good programs. So why are we still stuck at three hundred people?”—or two thousand or wherever their growth has been arrested. They’re telling me they’re not happy with their size and speed, but they keep doing the same things repeatedly, hoping the results will magically change the

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next time. But it's not the same things—in their frustration, they try to work harder, they ask more from their people, they're a little more intense, and they desperately search for the “missing ingredient” of success. None of these solutions provides more than a fleeting promise of change. In most cases, they're not asking the right questions.

Instead, they need to step back to analyze their systems and structures. If they improve these, size and speed almost inevitably follow. Systems aren't just buildings, programs, products, and budgets. They are *processes* that create and use buildings, programs, products, and budgets to facilitate growth and change. The systems include the organization's platforms, communication tools, and training devices to impart vision, inspire hope to meet the need, and enlist passionate involvement. When the commitment for systems to excel takes root in an organization, every planning meeting, every leadership event, every building, every dollar, and every communication becomes saturated with meaning. The organization's systems become well-oiled, powerful machines to accomplish great things.

The structure is the organizational chart of people who work together. We don't just fill in boxes on a chart. We find passionate, skilled people who see the system as an essential tool to meet the compelling need and make the vision a reality.

Systems and structures are inextricably related, and they enable the organization to reach out to touch their community. The beating heart of an organization's systems is the set of connections leaders have with their audience. Do the customers, the people in the congregation, or the needy people in the community believe the organization cares about them? How do we connect with people in the community or our customers? How do we recruit employees

and volunteers? How do we develop leaders? Has the senior leader created a culture where employees, staff teams, administrators, and volunteers are enamored with the vision? The real issue isn't, "Can our people repeat the vision statement?"—though that's a major hurdle for many organizations. It is, "Do they *own* it? Does the need captivate their hearts and motivate them to move heaven and earth to make a difference?" If people are genuinely gripped by the vision, they'll use the systems to effect change.

Ultimately, all questions are people questions. How do we touch them? How do we draw them in? How do we empower them? How do we make decisions so everyone feels heard and understood? How do we celebrate their accomplishments?

No matter how beautifully we construct our systems to achieve more size and speed, we'll feel as though we're running in mud if we don't have the right people in our structures.

Continuing with the ladder metaphor from chapter 1, if leaders have unqualified people holding their ladders, they won't be able to climb very high. The ones who help us climb six feet up a step-ladder may not be the ones who can hold it securely so we can climb twenty feet up an extension ladder. And the ones who help us climb twenty feet may not be the ones who have the strength, skill, and commitment to help us scale a forty-five-foot ladder. Even strong and talented people aren't helpful if they get distracted, walk away, or worse, kick out the bottom of the ladder so it falls. We may enlist people we hope will be right for our teams, but we may be disappointed. Our success with selection will be, at least to some degree, trial and error, but finding the right ones is essential. Nothing else will do.

How do you know if someone isn't the right person? Here's a clue: if someone on your team resigns or threatens to resign, accept

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it! As organizations move forward, the people chosen as ladder holders may need different skills, more training, a more expansive background, wider perspectives, stronger discipline, better talents to process and communicate information, and greater commitment to the leader and the vision of the organization. This doesn't mean the people who served faithfully as the organization grew aren't valuable. They were God's gift to the leader and the company, church, or nonprofit. But they may not be equipped to hold the ladder as the leader takes the organization higher.

We don't discard those faithful, committed men and women. Instead, we make sure we find a place for them that fits their talents and capacity. At some point all of us reach the limit of our capacity, so limits aren't a character flaw in any way. Some people may not be on our team any longer, but they can serve incredibly well at the level we just left, where other leaders in our organizations are climbing higher—just not as high as our ladder. It is, I believe, a dictum of leadership to understand a simple but crucial principle about reaching your desired future: those who got you here may not be the ones to take you there.

One of the principles we might learn from the military culture is that turning a blind eye to incompetence or a bad attitude inevitably leads to a disaster down the road. I'm not insinuating that leaders need to clean house and fire every person on their teams every few years, but I'm recommending that leaders evaluate the capacity of each person on the team from time to time. As the ladder gets higher, the leader can clearly outline the job descriptions of the ladder holders for the next extension—and give each person on the team a choice. Some will choose to acquire greater skills and expand their capacity, but some won't or can't, so they need to be gently reassigned to a role that fits them. When I talk

to pastors, heads of nonprofits, and business leaders, I tell them every staff member needs to know: “If you don’t grow, you’ve gotta go.” It’s a bit blunt, but it gets the message across.

It’s never a mystery who needs to be let go and replaced in any organization. When I meet with leadership teams about the need for every person on the team to be growing so they can hold a higher ladder, I often ask this question: “If you could walk into the office tomorrow and fire one person—and there would be no consequences at all for you or the organization—do you know who you would fire?” I have yet to find any leader who didn’t instantly say, “Of course!”

Every organization has somebody (or more than one somebody) who is obviously a drag on the culture, relationships, and effectiveness of the team—and has been a drag for much longer than anyone wants to admit. You don’t have to be an HR specialist to know who this person is. If leaders don’t act to first confront this person and offer a chance for improvement—and if there is no change, release the person—every other person on the team has the right to wonder, “Does the leader see what we see? If he does, why doesn’t he do something about it?”

It doesn’t take long for trust to erode when leaders are too timid to take necessary action. When leaders don’t make tough decisions about people who are a drag on their teams, they lose leadership equity with the rest of the team. Every decision raises or lowers the leader’s equity, and the refusal to address the elephant in the room knocks a big hole in the bucket. At that point, equity doesn’t seep out; it flows out.

A PROCESS BEFORE A DECISION

We aren't uncaring when we require growth from our people as our ladder extends higher and higher. We're just being reasonable that a bigger vision requires greater skill and capacity from the members of our team. Someone who flies a single-engine Cessna and one who flies a 777 are both pilots, but they have very different skills and capacities. If a company buys the latest accounting software, they must train their people, or find new people, to get the most out of it.

In churches, this principle applies to worship leaders, small group coordinators, administration, sound systems, student ministries, men's and women's ministries, and every other aspect of church life and growth. In business, it applies to production, marketing, distribution, and all the elements under those headings. In every conceivable field, it's foolish to design magnificent systems and fail to anticipate the needed growth in the people—the organizational structure—to make the systems work. When we don't anticipate the growth needed for our people to use expanded systems, we set them up for failure and create headaches for ourselves. That's not a recipe for success!

As you read this chapter, I'm sure you're thinking of wonderful people who have been with you for years. They have been faithful and loyal, and they have put their blood, sweat, and tears into their work. They have proven to be competent workers, and they've become trusted friends. It's inconceivable to walk in and simply let them go—and I want to assure you, that's not what I'm recommending.

You know you need ladder holders at a higher level of competence, talent, and execution if you're going to climb higher. The

solution is to institute a good process before you need to make any hard decisions. Let me offer some suggestions for this process:

Ask yourself, “As this person’s leader, how can I help him grow in knowledge, skills, and passion?”

One of your primary roles is to equip and empower those you lead. How well are you performing this role? Equipping people involves training in skills, but it’s more than that. We equip people to see their unique contribution to the greater vision so they’re highly motivated every day. We also equip them to communicate well with everyone on the team and in their spheres of influence. We equip them to excel up and down the chain of command and with all their peers. We empower them with clear direction and authority to get their jobs done—without them feeling abandoned or micromanaging them. What are the resources you’re spending on these people to help them grow? Do you have a development plan for each member of the team, or do you expect them to just pick up new skills on their own? Our task is to help them grow personally as well as professionally. The two spheres are always closely connected.

Do the people on your team have mentors? Are these mentors inspiring them and challenging them to grow? When was the last time you asked people on your team to describe the impact of their mentors? Mentors aren’t optional because people without mentors are destined to become stagnant in their growth.

What are the choke points in your organization that block communication, stifle creativity, and create confusion and frustration? Every organization has them. What are yours? For instance, what metrics are discussed in each team meeting? Are you too focused on goals and tasks and not enough on inspiring people and creating

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a vibrant culture? Or are you so focused on the intangibles of the culture that people don't know what's expected of them?

How do you facilitate networking for each person on the team? Are you introducing them to outstanding leaders you've met? What books are you encouraging them to read? What conferences are you paying for them to attend? How are you helping them stay up with current trends in their roles? Who are the leaders who are forecasting change? How are you connecting your people with the most knowledgeable people in their fields?

Great leaders don't run on autopilot. They're involved in developing the people on their teams so they will be personally inspired and fulfilled, and so they will gain the skills they need for the next level of the organization's growth.

EVALUATE THE SUPERVISORS THROUGHOUT YOUR ORGANIZATION

Take time to interact individually with people at all levels of your structure, and ask a simple question: "How are you getting along with your supervisor?"

In most cases, the old saying is true: people quit their bosses, not their jobs. Some of the factors that drive employees to give up and leave are directly related to "bad bosses": overloading people with responsibilities and expecting the impossible, demanding updates on every detail of a project, failure to give adequate oversight and resources for employees to get the job done, and letting other employees poison the workplace environment.

If you don't ask, you may never know the impact of the people in leadership roles on the men and women who serve on their teams. Evaluate the influence of all the supervisors: What kind of

environment are they creating? How are they providing resources, inspiration, and training? What is the mood of people several layers down the organizational chart? Ask the same questions of all your supervisors that you ask yourself.

OVER-COMMUNICATE AND ASSUME NOTHING

Too many leaders are so consumed with top-level matters that they aren't in touch with people even one layer down the organizational chart, much less the names in the boxes at the end of the lines, the men and women who connect with visitors when they walk through the doors and customers when they call to place an order.

The best leaders take time to walk the halls, stop and talk, and get to know people in the farthest offices, out in the field, and in the parking lot. These leaders understand that a personal connection takes a little time, but it may be the best investment they can make in producing a healthy organization full of people who are passionate about fulfilling the vision.

MAKE PERSONAL IMPROVEMENT PLANS STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

Personal and professional development seldom just happens. Almost always, this level of improvement is the product of intentional planning and a rigorous commitment by leaders *and* those who are being developed. This requires supervisors to become coaches who are actively involved in the lives of others instead of just telling them what to do and demanding compliance. These four

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commitments help leaders close the gap between their employees' current performance and the higher level of competence they'll need for the future. It's a comprehensive process—one that promises the richest relationships, the clearest communication, and the greatest hope for real growth for each person on the team.

Quite often, especially in large organizations, I've seen top leaders who are growing quickly in their understanding, skills, and capacity, but their executive staff members don't invest time in personal and professional growth because they're so busy trying to keep up. There is a "growth gap" between the top leader and the team. The people on the team aren't thinking about increasing their capacity; they're just trying to get a million things done today! The solution is twofold: the top leaders need to invest time and resources in their executive team, and the team members need to carve time out of their packed schedules to learn and grow. Again, this isn't negotiable. It's essential if leaders are going to climb higher and if their teams are to avoid burnout.

CREATE A COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT

Individual mentoring and training is important, but our efforts to equip our staff work better if people are thriving in a collaborative environment. We are social animals. Yes, plenty of people are introverts on personality profiles, but that doesn't mean they don't care about people and don't need them. It just means they gain more energy doing activities alone or with only a person or two. God has made us so that none of us can thrive without meaningful human connections. As leaders, one of our main tasks is to provide the kind of relational connections that inspire people instead of

discouraging them. Let me outline a few activities leaders can use to build strong relationships on a team. In every team meeting, carve out time and be prepared to lead the team to do the following:

Remember and be refreshed by the grand vision for the church, business, or nonprofit. We're thoroughly human, and it's easy to lose sight of the what and why we exist. You don't need to hand out brochures that reintroduce your people to the organization, but it would be helpful to regularly say, "Let's remember how we got to this point today," and remind people why they got up and came to the office that morning. It might not hurt you to remember it too.

Carve out enough time to *brainstorm on important topics*. We always have more details to cover than we have time for, but great teams don't thrive on mind-numbing details.

They thrive when they have time to dream, to imagine, and to bounce ideas off each other. This takes time, but it sends a loud and clear message that you value everyone's contribution.

Create an "iron sharpening iron" environment (Prov. 27:17). Competition can be destructive or constructive. Envy and jealousy seriously threaten the cohesion of a team—or a marriage or any other important relationship—but good-hearted peer pressure encourages people to do their best. How can you tell the difference? It's easy. How do others respond when someone succeeds or fails? If they discount the success and glory in the failure, it's toxic. If they cheer others' success and comfort them when they fail, it's wonderfully supportive.

Find ways to specifically complement each team member's efforts by *helping the team work collaboratively*. Stagnant and conflicted teams find ways to sabotage each other's work, but people who live and work in a supportive environment find ways to help each other accomplish their goals.

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Why do people on your team come to work each day? What is it that causes the light to come into their eyes? What brings out the very best in them? Exceptional leaders and members of leadership teams don't do what they do for money, acclaim, or power. They work hard and cheerfully, facing heartaches and overcoming disasters, because they believe two incontrovertible truths: the organization gives meaning to their lives, and the people they work with are honorable people who value the same meaning. Anything less than that leads to drift, apathy, protecting turf, and the varied dark colors of fear, envy, and resentment.

When you plan team meetings, keep these four activities in mind. Keep them in your work area so you make sure to include them in the list of topics you'll cover. Of course, you'll have to find the right balance between creating a supportive environment and covering all the details on your list—but lean toward creating the environment.

CHAPTER 5

PREPARING YOUR SUCCESSOR

SUCCESSION IS NOT ABOUT FILLING leadership vacancies; it's about creating an organization's future. It's about looking down the road, determining what future challenges await the organization and providing what's needed to arrive at the desired destination—including the necessary leadership. It should be a positive process, not merely a negative one.

If you're at the helm of an organization—regardless of your age—you should be giving more thought to your succession. Admittedly, that's a tough task for a leader who's between 20 and 40 years of age. If you're young and healthy, and your organization is vibrant, it's easy to relegate thoughts of succession planning to the back burner.

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Our organizations need to experience a profound change in focus about succession planning. We must make the critical connection between organizational success and leadership sustainability.

SELECTING A SUCCESSOR

Internal versus external candidates. One of the most commonly debated issues in leadership succession is whether there's a significant advantage to selecting an internal or an external candidate. There are convincing arguments and downsides on both sides.

Outsiders bring a fresh perspective to an organization, whether it's a church, a non-profit organization, or a multi-national corporation. It's no surprise that troubled organizations in need of a turnaround tend to favor external leaders. However, if some critical talents are out-of-balance, an outsider can quickly become a disadvantage. In some cases, ignorance about local traditions and the importance of a strong organizational culture can become serious liabilities. This can often be the cause of departures in churches and in other organizations.

Cultural compatibility can be the difference between success and failure. Boards that rely on external candidates risk hiring someone with no knowledge of the organization's culture. Outsiders aren't the only ones who can turn a troubled organization around. Insiders who understand how an organization works can also be dynamic change agents.

Finding a talented insider can be problematic, however. A capable leader with significant abilities may be unwilling to wait on the sidelines. Losing potential candidates reduces our pool of available talent. In addition, internal candidates who are known quantities are somehow perceived as less capable than external

ones. It's also not uncommon for executive search firms to favor external candidates for CEO slots and other high-profile positions. Church boards can find an outsider more intriguing simply because they're unfamiliar territory.

Tangible and intangible qualities. Typically, evaluating potential candidates involves references and resumes. I suggest developing a sketch of where the organization should be in five to ten years and then identifying candidates with the skills needed to get it there.

Despite all the time we spend evaluating tangible qualities, these characteristics don't really reveal much about the person. How much can we realistically expect to learn from a professionally written resume? In the end, it's the intangible qualities—interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, family life, and humility—that are important. Ignore these intangible qualities and they'll come back to bite you.

By looking for important intangible qualities, we can get an early indication of how a person will really perform. To discern intangibles, try placing people into a variety of environments, in addition to the regular interview sessions. Observe how they interact over a weekend, while with family, at a reception or at a baseball game.

Family-owned business considerations. When the board of directors share the same parents or the principals are a husband-wife team, somewhat different considerations apply. Here, decisions about succession can be complicated by emotional factors that aren't present in other companies and organizations. It's not uncommon to feel an emotional obligation to take care of someone. This can be especially true when a family member insists on having a certain role but lacks certain competencies or won't pursue the necessary qualifications. In these situations, the

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bottom line has to be doing what's necessary to keep the company effective for the long run. It can't become a popularity contest; it has to be about ensuring competency.

One versus many successors. Some executives opt to divide their responsibilities among multiple successors. This is not a path that's trouble free. Jesus summarized the problem when He said, "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other" (Matthew 6:24).

A workable solution has to include clear roles and responsibilities. Problems will arise when that clarity is missing. Naming multiple successors is not always an unworkable solution, however. It can be appropriate in cases where it's difficult to find the necessary talents in one person. In cases where it's not as clear-cut, it's important to clearly state that there's only one person in charge—one president, one senior pastor or one chief executive.

Generational styles. I've witnessed 60-year old incumbents selecting 48-year old successors. Potentially, that's a problem. Some of these incumbents are picking people who are like them, who represent the closest thing they can find to their comfort zone. This misses the point.

Succession is always about planning the organization's future. In the future, everyone is leaving their respective comfort zones. The future is about change. It's about everyone expanding our circles and our frames of reference. If we're only looking for people like us—in terms of our generation or some other criteria—we may be limiting the future growth of the organization.

Successor naming considerations. If you're going to recommend someone for the position, realize that you're putting a sizeable amount of your "relational equity" at stake. It's important to

understand that it's *you*—not the nominee—that's being placed on probation while everyone waits to see the results produced.

If you're in a situation where a successor is already named, it's important for you to develop your strategic phase-out plan to ensure a proper handoff of responsibilities. As you move closer to the end of the transition, the interactions become more intense for everyone involved. Your successor and the succession team that remain in the organization will begin feeling the stress of new responsibilities, the incumbent starts recognizing the reality of their approaching departure, and the stakeholders begin the process of releasing one leader while also embracing another.

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP CANDIDATES

In this fast-food world, we shouldn't expect to find a made-to-order successor. Even if we found someone with the right qualifications, some development would likely be necessary. Having a leadership-development focus is an effective method for growing the type of successors your organization needs. A well designed internal program becomes an incubator for precisely the types of leadership qualities that you require.

Any organization with a reputation for developing leaders gains a number of benefits. Companies with highly regarded development programs typically have an easier time attracting and hiring promising talent. Don't underestimate how attractive a development program can be to potential hires. In addition to helping recruit and develop potential successors, leadership development can keep any organization from losing talented people.

Any development program assumes that the organization has some idea about the qualities and competencies that it values. If

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you haven't already, describe those important qualities and attributes. From there, find ways to provide the necessary training and development opportunities. Many organizations employ some method of assessing where their leaders are in relation to important attributes. This enables them to personalize development.

Growing and developing others is not solely the work of a human resources department. It's vital for leaders from the Baby Boomer generation to realize this and to become more intentional about developing others. Many pastors and other organizational leaders were not apprenticed, but this situation is changing in many top companies, where senior leaders are increasingly more involved in leadership development.

Adopting purposeful development models is not out of any organization's reach. I always tell senior leaders that the first step is to realize that we must find ways to give away what we were never given, to provide a gift to the next generation of leaders. Since we tend to teach like we were taught, just having that realization is vital. From there, we can begin to take the necessary steps.

Formal development is not sufficient. It's critical that we also begin mentoring one or more leaders to fully develop competent successors. Mentoring is different from development because it provides a level of accessibility between a senior leader and a protégé. It offers the opportunity for more individualized conversations that can be more personalized than group sessions.

Our organizations have high-potential leaders—including our successors—who need to be mentored. Many of them are looking for someone to take an interest in them, to help them to develop to the next stage.

When our successors are experienced in moving forward in their own leadership journeys, they're ready to provide this level

of visionary leadership to our churches, our organizations and our companies. Once they have been developed and challenged, they're ready to begin creating the future.

Any successful transition must involve planning the next steps in our personal journey and assisting whoever succeeds us. It also means confronting whatever anxieties we might have, examining what really motivates us and considering the source of our self-image. Providing considerations and ideas about these personal issues is the focus of this chapter.

COMMON TRANSITIONAL ISSUES

It doesn't matter how big or how influential your organization might be, navigating the next step in your transition is going to create some anxiety. It's best to be prepared to confront the inevitable emotions.

Considering a move away from a high-level leadership role is disconcerting. We may feel as though we're disconnecting from a large piece of our everyday existence and identity. As we depart, we may also feel like we're leaving behind a huge chunk of our status and our self-worth. It's an awkward but unavoidable transition.

Certainly, we can deny or prolong the inevitable day of departure. An attachment to the privileges that accompany our positions will certainly occur. When I chose to leave my role as college president, I had to make certain adjustments. I no longer had that office or the assistant that made my work easier. One day, I was the college president. The next day, I had to start over again as "Sam." But it was a choice.

Successfully navigating our personal transitions involves getting in touch with our values and our motivations instead of focusing

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on externals. It means considering our dreams and identifying precisely who we are. In the end, we can quit a position but we cannot quit who we are. A mover-and-shaker type is going to continue directing traffic and organizing even if they leave a CEO or senior leadership slot to volunteer somewhere.

There are certain things that are part of who you are. Even when you're no longer a pastor, there are talents and gifts that remain part of your nature and your essence. Each of us must find ways to realize what those things are. We must ask ourselves: What would we continue doing even after we relinquish this role or position? Those things are part of who we are. Wherever we are, we will always express those values and those gifts.

Succession planning provides us with an opportunity to face ourselves. We have the privilege of confronting ourselves apart from our everyday work and considering what's important to us.

Facing ourselves is a necessary part of successful succession planning. It's about continuing our journey toward a balanced existence. Finding that elusive balance is not about scheduling every minute of every day; it's about discovering and emphasizing what we value. It's about finding our joy and making it our job.

Most of the senior pastors that I know desire to mentor and pour themselves into other pastors and leaders. Because their schedules don't allow much room for this, they can rarely make it happen. It only seems to occur when they're invited to speak in other churches or asked to address a leadership conference. The more intentional development of other leaders just doesn't happen in the manner that they'd like. If you're one of these pastors, remember that while large speaking venues may be attractive, they do not have the same dynamic effect as developing a small group of others. I encourage

you not to let “the job”—the things that you have to do—keep you from getting joy from the things that you want to do.

NAVIGATING A NEW TRANSITION

Leaving our current position—by itself—will seem negative unless we are transitioning into some other activity that fully engages our attention. All of us need to transfer our creativity, our leadership and vision to something else that gives us significance.

It’s especially necessary for founders and entrepreneurs to have another focus. If they don’t, it’s going to be harder for them to keep from interfering. Having too much idle time may cause them to worry that their successors are making mistakes that will destroy what they’ve built. Working on something else that commands your attention, something that gives you a sense of renewed purpose, fulfillment and meaning will be good for you and for your successor.

Moving forward with a succession plan must involve identifying our motivations and taking some time to tune into our dreams. Once we’ve spent time planning the organization’s future, we must spend time planning our own future. Answering some simple questions can make it easier to develop a clear plan for our lives before stepping down. For example:

- » What would I do if weren’t running this organization?
- » What would I like to accomplish in the next 10 years?
- » What would I like to change about my life?
- » Do I want to remain close to the work, perhaps in a consulting role?
- » How much would I like to travel?
- » What volunteer or charity work has always attracted me?

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There will be many new opportunities available to us after succession. Developing a plan for our lives as part of our transition planning can help us to take advantage of these new prospects.

SMOOTHING THE WAY FOR A SUCCESSOR

Planning the organization's future and giving ample thought to our own, aren't the only considerations we must make in succession planning. We must also ensure that we gracefully pass the baton to our successor in a positive, affirming manner. It's crucial that we establish the right tone for this change.

One of the best ways to set the stage for a successor is by establishing and adhering to a reasonable but definite departure date. Sometimes, CEOs and other leaders stay on even after their departure date. I have a friend who succeeded a university president. The former president chose to keep an office at the university. He continued going to his office everyday because of the perks it offered. Unfortunately, the institution had two heads because the former president couldn't sit on his hands and kept getting involved.

It's important to establish and maintain strong boundaries after your departure. Don't allow people to circumvent the new leader. You might even consider letting everyone know that if they send you an email about issues concerning your old position, that you'll be forwarding the message to your successor.

There are situations where it might make sense to remain with the organization, but in another role. This is different from what occurs in large corporations. Unless they also happen to be the board's chairman, once a CEO is replaced, that person typically departs. In smaller organizations and entrepreneurial firms, it's often beneficial for the organization to have the founder around

in some well-defined role. In some cases, a departing CEO might remain in a lower-ranking executive role, such as chief-technology officer, for example. It might benefit the church for the founding pastor to remain available as a consultant. For example, I now serve on the university board and as president-emeritus.

When properly planned and implemented, staying connected to the organization might aid a transition. When handled in a phased approach, this method can be especially reassuring to customers, a congregation and other stakeholders. It's crucial, however, that a departing leader's role be very well defined. Proper planning prevents poor performance. It could prove extremely awkward for a new senior pastor or CEO to establish their leadership while their predecessor is still around, or to have their predecessor reporting to them. How you leave is more important than how you came in.

Whether it's appropriate in your situation to depart or to remain connected, it's always important to honor your successor and do whatever you can to help them rise to the task of establishing the organization's future. Find ways to praise their capabilities to those who remain. Look for opportunities to pass along the heartbeat, the culture and the vision that drive the organization to your successor.

CHAPTER 6

COMMUNICATING WITH CLARITY

FOR OUR COMMUNICATION to be effective today, it must cut across generations, cultures, and even across the globe. The biggest dilemma in communication is that each generation communicates and reacts to communication differently—and too often communicators don't realize that their words have gone past their intended receivers.

GENERATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Perhaps the easiest way to explain the problems of generational communication is to use the terms sociologists use to distinguish the generations—seniors, builders, boomers, busters, and mosaics.

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LEADERSHIP AND FIVE GENERATIONS

1. Seniors refers to anyone born before 1928.

Some place them before 1930. The exact year of birth of people in these categories isn't the issue as much as their socialization and general attitudes. The socialization of seniors focused on the Great Depression, Franklin Roosevelt's administration, and World War II. They grew up during a time of relative unity in the nation and with a common core of values. With few exceptions, they are the retired generation. Because of the Great Depression experience, many worry about whether they will have enough money to pay their medical bills and sometimes fear that Social Security and Medicare will fail them.

2. Builders refers to the next generation, who came just before the baby boomers.

Many of them remember World War II, and all of them can talk about the Korean Conflict. They liked Ike for president and remember the day John Kennedy died. That is, they were born anywhere between the late 1920s and 1945. Builders say, "Be grateful you have a job." They're less concerned about what they do or how fulfilling it may be and more concerned with having work and a paycheck. "Just endure if you don't like what you're doing."

3. Boomers (or baby boomers) are those born between 1946 and 1964.

Their attitude is likely to be, "You owe me a job. Give me a good one." These are the offspring of the two older generations. They grew up with Elvis and the Beatles. Most of them had strong feelings about the Vietnam War, which added words such as Agent Orange and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to the nation's

vocabulary. Their parents had worked to give them a better life, and they learned to expect higher standards of living. Instead of buying small houses and older cars, they say, “I deserve to have the best now.”

4. Busters (or Gen-X), those born approximately between 1965 and 1983, say, “Ignore them.”

This generation of more than 40 million is the offspring of the baby boomers, a population of 77 million Americans. They tend to be serious about life and therefore give consideration to critical decisions. They are also stressed out. School, family, peer pressure, sexuality, techno-stress, finances, high crime, and even political correctness contribute to their stressful lives. Yet they aren’t driven toward success as much as their predecessors. They are self-reliant, believing they can make sense out of their religious faith. This doesn’t mean they focus on Christianity; rather, they tend toward a broader view of “spirituality.” And at the same time, they’re skeptical—which may be a defense against disappointment.

5. Mosaics (or Nexters), born between 1984 and 2002, are well acquainted with technology and are looking for ways to use it.

Their attitude toward work moves from mastering tasks, to making money with their skills, to using that money. Until the destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001, Desert Storm was the only American military involvement they personally experienced. They’re labeled mosaics because of their eclectic lifestyle, their nonlinear thinking, the fluidity of their personal relationships, and what someone has called their “hybrid spiritual perspective.” They baffle their elders by their comfort with contradictions related to everything from spirituality to morality to families and

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politics. They will enthusiastically pursue spiritual goals, but they are less likely to feel constrained by traditional theological parameters. They are also the most information-overloaded generation.

A large number of this generation saw their parents lose their jobs due to downsizing. Thus, they distrust institutions. They are also the first generation to be socially active since the 1960s. They bring their socially conscious values to the workplace.

GENERATIONAL CULTURES

This five-generation span also reflects the speed of communication. E-mail is both a terrific blessing and a horrible curse. It's terrific because it has accelerated communication; but it's terrible because it has accelerated miscommunication and misinformation. What used to take a week to travel around the globe now can be spread within hours—long before the accuracy of the content has been verified.

I've discovered several web sites devoted just to listing hoaxes and bogus virus threats, often called urban legends. Too many people spread the message without looking at such web sites, and some probably don't even know they exist. Too often they operate out of panic and perpetuate rumors and encourage fear.

Another less obvious but dangerous problem with email is that it can be responsible for the increase of conflict. When we did more snail-mailing, people tended to take time to think through what they wanted to say before they put paper in their typewriter or got out their stationery. Today it's easy to read an e-mail, react, and dash off an answer. In many cases, the immediate response creates conflict because of hurried reading or frenzied responding.

If someone comes to my office, sits down across from my desk, and says, “I disagree with you, Sam,” I can begin to deal with that difference. I hear the voice and observe the body language. This is true for all of us, because we interact and involve ourselves with more than just the words. E-mail, however, doesn’t give us that luxury. We may automatically dash off a response— and then have to send a series of e-mails to correct our miscommunication.

E-mailing affects the church in many ways. Who is sending out the information? Does it come from an authorized “server”? Can everyone send whatever emails they want to the entire membership? Is it all right for the entire congregation to receive messages from a member who has access to their e-mail addresses and uses that to spread information? What happens if the message sent, even from an authorized person, is misunderstood or misinterpreted? I assure you, this does happen—all the time.

Intra-office communication is another problem area. Suppose a deacon comes into the church kitchen and sees two frying pans left in the wrong place. Maybe there’s a Coke can left in a window. The angry deacon fires a heated note by intra-office memo. The receiver gets the memo, reads it hurriedly, and bumps back a response. “They are only teens. Be thankful the place is as clean as it is.” Instead of such trivial issues (and such things do happen) being worked out between leadership and the person(s) responsible, they end up spreading among people who don’t need to be involved.

During my years of being a pastor, irate church members had two major means of complaint without a face-to-face confrontation. Some chose to use the telephone, and most of the time they were willing to listen for an explanation. Others who wouldn’t express strong negative feelings directly chose to write angry letters that came to me via snail mail. Occasionally they pushed

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envelopes under my door when they came to a church meeting. Most of the time, however, it took at least twenty-four hours before I received and read their angry messages. Sometimes their letters hurt, shocked, or disappointed me. I was surprised that these people would react in such petty ways—and for such trivial reasons. The one advantage I had was time. The delay gave me the opportunity to reflect on what I read, and I was able to think about their needs and concerns. I also had choices on how to respond. I could send back a letter, and that might take as long as three more days, or I could wait a few hours and call the person on the phone. The passing of time can often have a significant healing effect. When I did get back to an irate member, hours or days had passed and the person's anger had usually cooled.

Today the complaints come faster, almost instantaneously. For those unwilling or unable to express anger directly, e-mail is the method. They dash off a few sentences and click the send button. The speed with which these complaints and rapid-fire responses are sent increases the possibility of anger intensifying. My point is that we have changed from a culture that moves slowly to one that is nearly instant. This lays a heavy burden on us to communicate thoughtfully and clearly. I urge people to pause and reflect before typing out a hurried message. In fact, the more urgent I feel about a message, the more slowly I need to respond. Before I press the send button, it helps to ask, "How will he (or she) respond to this e-mail?"

Too many people forget the common rules of kindness and consideration when they pound out their e-mails. Perhaps before we send the next e-mail or intra-office communication either in anger or in response to anger, it may help to think of these words spoken by Jesus:

“Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. . . . If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that” (Matthew 5:44–47 NLT).

COMMUNICATION ACROSS CULTURES

Anyone who has traveled in other countries knows that we have gestures and speech patterns that are not universally understood. For instance, Americans gesture “OK” by forming a circle with the thumb and index finger, but in South America, that is an obscene gesture. We think nothing of accepting gifts or doing actions with our right hand or our left, because in the United States, there is no difference. In some cultures, however, it is an insult to offer or receive with the left hand.

Words also have different meanings. For instance, the term for a female dog seems to be offensive only in America, but some of our harmless words cause offense in other cultures. In England some consider bloody as a vulgar expression.

CHAPTER 7

CASTING A VISION

WE CAN HAVE THE PERFECT VISION, but unless we know how to cast that vision, it will never grab hold of anyone. Leaders often think that vision casting is telling people the plan: “We’re going to build a new multipurpose space.” That isn’t vision casting. It’s an announcement about why parking will be disrupted. Vision casting is less like an announcement and more like a pitch the professionals use to entice potential investors. When business leaders want to expand, they have to find someone who will invest money in the business now with the hope of future rewards. For a business leader to hook an investor, she not only has to communicate the plan, but she has to sell the future benefits.

When we cast our vision, we must think of it in the same way. We are not trying to inform people; we are trying to get people to

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invest. To capture the imagination of those vision-investors, we need to have a strategic plan based on who we're trying to catch.

FIVE TYPES OF PEOPLE

Generally speaking, there are five different types of people we need to catch with our vision. Each of these types will respond to different kinds of bait and hooks. If we understand who we are trying to catch, our casting will be more successful.

EXCITED EMBRACERS

These people are excited to embrace our vision. They are ahead of the curve and believe that whatever we're proposing is a good idea the minute we suggest it. They don't need to hear all the details. They will feed off our vision, multiply it, and bring it back to us with new ideas. They have energy, they're excited, and they're on top of things. Unfortunately, there are few of them. Excited Embracers make up approximately 2 percent of the population.

EARLY EMBRACERS

Like the Excited Embracers, Early Embracers will embrace our vision early, though maybe not with as much zeal as the Excited Embracers. These people will stick with us as we work to make the vision a reality. Early Embracers make up approximately 18 percent of the population.

MIDDLERS

Middlers are the largest group. They make up approximately 60 percent of the population. These people hear our vision and want more time to think about it. Even after they've considered what we've told them, they're still squarely in the middle.

They're not against the vision, but neither are they for it. In fact, they probably won't make up their minds one way or another unless a friend convinces them to. In the 2004 presidential election between George Bush and John Kerry, analysts called these undecided Middlers the Swing Voters because they could swing their vote for either candidate.

LATE EMBRACERS

Unlike the Middlers, Late Embracers have already decided that they aren't in favor of whatever is on the table. However, late in the game, when there are no other choices left, they might grudgingly follow. They make up approximately 18 percent of the population.

NEVER EMBRACERS

We can always count on Never Embracers to disagree, no matter what the subject is. Don't plan on trying to change their decisions because their minds are already set. Fortunately, they make up only 2 percent of the population.

As we prepare to cast our vision, we know that the top 20 percent are strongly behind us, no questions asked. The bottom 20 percent are against us and asking a lot of questions. So as we get ready to cast the vision, we need to target the Middlers, the 60 percent who have not yet made up their minds.

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Unfortunately, what most leaders do is ignore the top 80 percent and immediately try to pacify the bottom 20 percent. We say things like, “If I could just get that 20 percent over here with me.” But we already know they are negative, pessimistic, sticks-in-the-mud, who aren’t going anywhere. Yet we keep going back to these same people.

I have a radical suggestion. This is contrary to what we’ve been doing, and it will take some getting used to; but it works. Take the bottom 20 percent, the ones we’ve been focusing all of our attention on, and ignore them.

That’s right. Don’t pay any attention to them. They aren’t going anywhere, and they’re not going to help us no matter what we do. So rather than focus on them, do the opposite and ignore them.

Of course, we’ll want to treat them like we treat the other groups. Make sure they get the same information, they’re notified of the same meetings, and they hear the same God-sized vision everyone else hears. But don’t do anything special for them; they get what everyone else gets. We don’t set up special meetings, we don’t take them out to lunch, and we don’t change our presentations in a way that will appeal to them alone. We no longer cater to them. As a population, we should treat them like we treat anyone else.

The first thing we notice is that we have more time. No longer are we setting up special meetings, revising our presentations, or worrying about the Late and Never Embracers. When we stop making special accommodations for people who aren’t about to change their minds, we have more time and energy.

Now take this newfound cache of time and spend it on the top 20 percent. Hanging out with the Excited and Early Embracers will pump them up. Listening to their ideas and encouraging them

into leadership roles will empower them. Suddenly, they become our allies in an intentional way.

As soon as there is momentum in the top 20 percent, we need to swing our attention to the large percentage of people in the middle. Just as candidates energize their bases and then go after the undecided votes, we can direct our attention to the Middlers after we've excited the base.

The mind set of Middlers is different than that of Embracers. The top 20 percent come to meetings to get excited. The bottom 20 percent come to meetings to get mad. The Middlers? They don't come to meetings. If we call a special meeting to cast our vision, the Middlers won't be attending.

Middlers also tend to resist authority and authority figures. They are more easily influenced by their peers and colleagues than they are by authority. Informal influence works best with Middlers. These are the people the candidate shakes hands with in the diner or the candidate's wife meets at school. Embracers, on the other hand, are the ones who show up at televised town hall meetings, waving signs.

When we're casting vision, how do we reach Middlers? We reach them informally. Instead of inviting them to special meetings, we talk to them in hallways, restrooms, and parking lots. We meet them over a cup of coffee, we share a pizza, or we discuss the vision while stacking chairs after a fellowship meal. Middlers will be much more receptive to our vision in these informal settings.

CASTING THE BIG VISION

When God gives us a vision—a really big vision—such as a renewed focus on global missions, a new community outreach program

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or a new building, we need to be strategic about how we cast it. Most of us cast our best pearls in front of the bottom 20 percent. But Scripture warns against casting “your pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6, KJV). I am not calling a group of people names, but I think this situation is a good application of that particular verse. Swine will trample our pearls and then turn on us, making us look like we’re the bad guys. If the same Scripture were written in a modern translation for leaders, it might say, “Don’t cast your vision in front of the bottom 20 percent because they’re going to destroy your vision and turn on you.”

This is an example of how we can be strategic in our casting. We have to prepare our message for the people, but we have to know what type of person we’re going to be talking to. We want to spend most of our time with the people who want to see our vision fulfilled. Then we can make them messengers to their friends, so we aren’t the only vision communicators.

IT’S NEVER THE MEETING

Always remember this: The meeting is never the most important thing. The meeting *before* the meeting and the meeting *after* the meeting are more important than the meeting. When it comes time for the actual meeting and we are all together, I will say things like: “It’s been such a delight talking to all five of you about my vision, and it is wonderful to see how everyone has responded. I have talked with each of you, and I am so encouraged about the feedback each of you has given me.”

After I’ve made my initial comments, then I start with the most positive person and say, “Andrew, tell us what you’re feeling about this.” Then I let Andrew pump everyone up. I will go around the

table doing this from the most positive to the least positive and will leave Gerald as the last guy. It becomes a kind of peer pressure. The Excited and Early Embracers will move the Middlers to their position and the Late and Never Embracers move toward the middle because they don't want to be left out.

That's why the meeting before the meeting and the meeting after the meeting are the most critical meetings we have. It is never the meeting. If we haven't made strategic decisions and done our homework on the people before the meeting, we aren't ready to cast our vision.

VISION IS TOP DOWN

I hate it when I call a business and have to be transferred five or six times to get the person I need. Some churches are like this. They've got a men's thing and a women's thing. These are separate from the Christian education thing. The children's thing is different than the youth thing; and, of course, the family thing is a whole other thing.

There can only be one vision and one visionary in the house. The vision needs to come from the top down. We can't have every department in a business or church casting its own vision. Leaders must wait for the leaders above them to cast their vision first.

VISION CASTING MUST BE A PRIORITY

In every service, in every meeting, it doesn't matter where we are or who we are talking to, we need to find a way to work the vision statement into the conversation. We don't have to quote it verbatim each time unless it's a catchy slogan, but we do have

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to keep the message and the essence of our vision in front of our people at all times.

We need to teach them to be vision-centric. Say to them, “This is our vision. Now the church down the road to the left is doing this, and the church down the road to the right is doing that, and that is wonderful for them. But our vision is different. This is our vision.” That vision should then drive all of the budgeting, staffing, and programming issues at the church. This is what makes a vision-centric church. The vision actually drives the decision making.

OUT OF ALIGNMENT

What happens when the vision of the leader is different than the vision of the people? Maybe my staff has a different focus. Maybe the church I lead wants to go in a new direction. The first question I should be asking is: How did this happen? The second question is: How did this happen on my watch?

Leaders must accept responsibility for what goes on in the organization. If there is a split in the vision of the church or business, the leader must answer the questions as to how this happened and how it happened now. Then the leader must figure out what to do to change it.

If my church moves away from my vision, I can’t jerk them back with one sermon or one staff meeting. Instead, I need to think of myself as an orthodontist trying to straighten teeth. I need to put the braces on the teeth and then with each visit I must slowly turn the key to bring the teeth back into alignment. I can’t just tighten them in one motion and say, “You’ve got straight teeth now.” Doing that could cause damage, and the results won’t last. Likewise, I

need to tighten and turn my people a little at a time until I bring them back to the vision.

I don't want to beat people up or accuse them of not doing what they should. It is not their fault that the vision went the other way. It is the leader's responsibility. Taking responsibility for a wandering vision will gain us an opportunity to correct it.

When I talk to the staff of an organization, in only a few minutes I can see who has and who hasn't bought into the leader's vision. If the people say, "Pastor's vision is . . ." instead of saying, "Our vision is . . ." there is a disconnect. If the leader says something like, "My people really want to do this and they want to do that," his language reveals that he hasn't bought into their ideas. The words used can alert us to vision that has shifted between the leader and his people.

Not only does the vision have to be cast—and cast correctly—it has to remain in front of the people until they absorb it as their own. The words used are important. Anything can be accomplished when everyone is using the same language. The goal of a leader is to cast the vision out to the people and hear it returned in these words, "Our vision is. . ." When the vision is properly cast, nothing is impossible for us or our organization.

CHAPTER 8

CREATING CULTURE

A MAZINGLY, SOME OF US WHO are incredibly perceptive about other cultures are clueless about the nature of relationships and attitudes around us each day. To be objective, we need to step back from time to time and take a good, long look in the mirror. We might be surprised at what we see.

People have an almost limitless capacity for self-deception. We don't know what we don't know and are therefore unconsciously incompetent. If we were aware of our deficits, we'd ask questions and find solutions, but because we're not aware, we stay stuck in the status quo until something shakes us awake.

Quite often, we need some help to see things clearly. We are simply too close to the people and systems in our own environment to be objective.

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BEYOND EXCUSES

When I talk with leaders and teams about creating a new culture, many of them instantly realize the beauty and power of working together in an inspiring environment, and they commit themselves to do whatever it takes to achieve it. Others, however, find creative excuses for remaining stuck in the past.

Analyzing a team's culture is a lot like marriage counseling. The way people relate to each other and the way things get done are entrenched patterns that have been in place for years. These patterns frustrate people, but nobody talks about them until someone from the outside addresses the core issues of culture, connection, and communication. When I consult with pastors and teams, I often begin by asking, "Imagine your team is the U.S. Congress. How does a bill get passed here?" Quite often, people roll their eyes or laugh in a passive-aggressive way. They feel uncomfortable because I've asked a question that addresses more than surface issues.

To help the team members uncover their needs and desires, I often ask, "If the meeting ended right now and you could make one suggestion to the pastor (or team leader) to improve the church or the team, what would it be? Anything goes. What would you suggest to him?" Recently, when I asked this question in a team, the responses included,

1. "Better strategic planning."
2. "Implement what we plan instead of just leaving the plans on a piece of paper."
3. "Clear communication and coordination." "Empower people to do what they're asked to do." "Simplify the strategy."

4. “Add strength and value to the present team.” “Relax more and enjoy what we do.”
5. “Clear and simple opportunities to engage the vision.” “Hold people accountable.”
6. “Plan ahead, and include us in the planning.” “Celebrate our achievements.”
7. “Stop changing the goalposts.”

Their answers told me volumes about their culture. These suggestions surfaced their perceptions of their current environment. Without saying, “Pastor, I don’t feel valued by you, and I’m afraid you’re going to replace me with someone else,” the person communicated the same idea by suggesting that the pastor “value the present team.” Words matter, and they often carry multiple meanings.

Pastors and team leaders genuinely want to be the best leaders they can be. When the issue of culture is raised, they simply haven’t known the right questions to ask to get below the surface to talk about the team’s environment. When I ask these questions and pastors hear their staff members’ responses, they are often surprised, but they always want to talk more about their perceptions. Insight provides choices, and these choices become steps in creating a vibrant culture.

Pastors and business leaders report that it’s relatively easy to institute a new program or introduce a new product, but changing the culture is the hardest thing they’ve ever done. It requires wisdom, courage, and tenacity, but it begins with an understanding of the current condition.

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A GLIMPSE OF THE CULTURE

I want to invite you and your team to look in the mirror to see the nature of your culture. The categories of “healthy” and “unhealthy” aren’t very helpful because they aren’t specific. To go deeper, we’ll examine seven important factors that shape organizational culture, and for each of these, we’ll identify particular attitudes and behaviors that point a culture toward either inspiration or toxicity. As we examine these, don’t focus on yourself. Instead, take the temperature of your whole team. Culture is about relationships, communication, and shared values, not just about an individual’s perceptions and behavior.

CONTROL

People function most effectively if they are given control (or authority) with responsibility. If they are held accountable for a task without having the means to accomplish it, they’ll fail, and they’ll be terribly frustrated.

On the other end of the spectrum, if control is concentrated in one person who insists on making virtually all important decisions, the organization experiences a significant bottleneck. It should be a warning if everyone is expected to consult with one person about everything before moving on. Teams thrive when there is a free flow of information and ready access to resources.

Contrary to the beliefs of some people, *control* isn’t a dirty word. Delegating responsibility and maintaining accountability are essential for any organization to be effective. Strong, effective teams have a “Goldilocks approach” to control: not too much, not too little, but just the right amount of checks and balances. The leader gives clear direction, assigns tasks, delegates authority,

provides resources, and then has a reasonable reporting procedure so the person can provide updates, coordinate with others, and stay on track until the task is finished.

Quite often, the real power broker on a team isn't the person at the head of the table. Good leaders involve everyone in the planning process, but sometimes an angry, sour, or demanding person can dominate a team. A sure sign of problems with control on a team are turf issues. When two or more people believe they have responsibility and authority for a task, they compete with each other for resources and, even more, for supremacy over each other.

Team members need to see themselves as partners in a grand venture, not competing for control over others, not carving out territory to defend to the death, but using delegated authority for the common good.

UNDERSTANDING

Every person on a team needs to have a clear grasp of the vision, his or her role, the gifts and contributions of the team members, and the way the team functions. Each person should be able to clearly articulate each of these vital aspects of the team's life.

The vision must be both global and specific—too big for anyone to accomplish without the power of God, but with handles on each person's specific role in fulfilling aspects of the overall vision. It breaks my heart when I talk to a staff member who says glumly, "I'm not really sure what I'm doing here."

Team communications are everybody's responsibility. Certainly the leader's task is to make sure each person clearly grasps the principles and delegated tasks, but good teams normalize the question everyone can ask: "Would you explain that again? I'm not

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sure I got it.” In this way, misunderstanding is never an excuse for not getting the job done. Similarly, before a meeting is over, the leader can ask each person to share priorities, schedule, and coordination needed with other team members. This way, everyone is on the same page.

Understanding, though, isn’t just about the *what* of ministry; it’s also about the *why*. Again, grasping the underlying concepts is everybody’s job. Leaders need to take time to explain how a new program fits into the plan, why it will make a difference in people’s lives, and the important role each person will play in making it successful.

LEADERSHIP

Healthy teams are pipelines of leadership development. They recognize that an organization is only as healthy as the pool of rising leaders, so they actively seek to *discover* those who show leadership potential, *develop* resources to equip and inspire leaders, and carefully *deploy* them in roles that enflame their hearts, challenge them to excel, and propel the organization to new heights.

We need to make a distinction between leadership and management. To develop people to become leaders, we focus on heart and character. Training is important, but it’s a management issue, equipping people to perform a particular task. Both are significant, but developing people is far more essential in creating a healthy culture than training people in specific skills. Plenty of toxic and discouraging cultures have highly trained, efficient staff members. They know how to do their jobs very well, but their culture stinks.

Many church teams focus on training people to accomplish tasks, but they neglect the essential role of developing leaders. In

many cases, staff members are under enormous stress. They have a long list of jobs that need to be done—and done now!—and they're desperate for help. They are thrilled and relieved when someone steps into the gap to complete a task, but they don't even think about developing the person as a leader. We'll never have truly healthy cultures, however, if we don't identify and develop a host of strong, creative, passionate leaders.

Team leaders need to be perceptive about how rising leaders are assimilated into the group. Are old leaders threatened, or do they celebrate and mentor the new people? Great organizations enlist existing leaders to be part of the leadership pipeline, encouraging them to offer their insights and expertise and to help young leaders in every possible way.

TRUST

Mutual trust among team members is the glue that makes everything good possible. Without it, a team quickly disintegrates into a gang of people protecting their turf and forming angry alliances. When people trust each other, they make a strong connection between the vision, their own roles, the input of others, strategic planning, and the steps of implementation.

Trust may be freely given, but it is usually earned as people watch each other respond in good times and bad. Integrity and consistency provide a firm foundation for relationships to thrive. Trust is fluid. It takes time to be built, but it can be destroyed in an instant. Trust can be shattered in an instant by a dramatic event, or, more often, it is slowly eroded by countless relatively small but abrasive comments and actions. Every team is made up of flawed human beings, so on every team, trust will be an issue to some

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degree at some time with someone. Depending on the situation, it doesn't have to ruin a team. In fact, relationships that rebuild broken trust often are stronger and healthier than ever before because the people involved had to be ruthlessly honest, find forgiveness, and communicate better than before.

UNAFRAID

Corporate courage is an incredibly appealing but slippery trait. Church teams aren't fighting a battle against flesh and blood, but men and women on staff teams face difficulties and challenges with courage if, and only if, they are convinced that what they are doing counts for all eternity and they believe in the people serving on their team.

Healthy teams foster the perspective that failure isn't a tragedy and conflict isn't the end of the world. Great leaders welcome dissenting opinions, as long as they are offered in good will and with an eye toward a solution. These teams are willing to take great risks and even to fail miserably because they've gotten over the notion that failure is a personal flaw.

They believe that God is worthy of noble efforts, and they trust that God smiles on them as they attempt great things for him. When they look at one another, they don't see competitors; they see friends who have their backs as they take big risks. Courage, support, and innovation go hand in hand in inspiring cultures.

RESPONSIVE

Teams with healthy cultures are alert to open doors and ones that are closing. An individual may not notice a particular threat

or opportunity, but someone else on the team will. These teams develop the productive habit of keeping their eyes open so that they can handle every situation: on the team, in individuals' lives, in the church family, and in the community.

For teams to be responsive, they have to develop a consistent process for collaboration, with communication lines that are wide open. They value analysis and feedback, and they work on becoming and staying aligned with one another. Responsive teams don't just focus on big goals and sweeping strategies. They develop the habit of taking care of the little things, such as promptly returning phone calls, responding to e-mails, and communicating decisions to everyone who needs to know when he or she needs to know it.

Leaders in healthy cultures work hard to disseminate information among the departments and get buy-in up and down the chain of command and between teams. Being responsive requires both a sensitive spirit and a workable system to make sure things don't fall through the cracks. The larger the organization grows, the greater the amount of energy that needs to be invested in being responsive to people inside and outside the team.

EXECUTION

In my conversations with leaders and team members, one of their chief concerns is that teams often talk about decisions but fail to follow through on implementing them. When they don't see the fruit of their discussions, they lose faith in each other and become discouraged. Executing decisions is a function of clarity, roles and responsibilities, and the system of accountability.

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To be sure that follow-through becomes the norm, leaders need to define goals very clearly. Decisions should be articulated with precision, including who, what, why, when, where, and how. Clear delegation is essential to execution. The person responsible needs to understand her authority and how to relate to everyone else involved. This person should walk out of the meeting with crystal-clear expectations, a plan to coordinate with others, deadlines, and any other requirements.

On some teams, accountability is haphazard at best, but this breeds complacency even among those who would normally be conscientious about following through with their commitments. People don't do what we expect; they do what we inspect. Plans are worthless unless they have target goals, deadlines, access to resources, and a budget. With those things in place, the leader needs to ask for regular updates on progress. She can ask in any way that works: e-mail, phone calls, personal appointments, or, even better, in the staff meetings. Some people mistakenly believe that deadlines aren't very important, but they are the benchmark that keeps a plan on track.

Developing a culture of accountability takes the mystery and the sting out of giving reports. If everybody is asked to report, then nobody is singled out. In a culture that executes plans well, the leader is committed to ongoing training to equip team members to achieve the highest goals.

GETTING BUY-IN

One person can change the composition of a team. It's best if the leader grasps the importance of creating an inspiring culture and

takes bold steps with the team, but a wise, tenacious team member can begin to create this kind of environment.

I've seen some leaders try to change their organizations by fiat, demanding that people trust each other, communicate freely, and be more responsive to those inside and outside the team. But as you can imagine, these efforts only further eroded the environment and created one more hurdle to overcome. Great leaders put cultural issues on the table and invite honest, open, and transparent conversations about changing the atmosphere. They know it's going to take time, and they are willing to lead the process. Building a great team involves everybody, and in fact it works most effectively when team members feel empowered to give input, develop strategies, and take steps in shaping the culture.

Changing a culture requires tremendous patience. We can rearrange boxes on an organizational chart in a moment, but changing culture is heart surgery. Culture is not only *what* we do but also *why* and *how* we do it. Culture is about the heart and head, and then it shapes what we do with our hands. Leaders also need a healthy dose of creativity as they take their teams through cultural change.

Cultural transformation may begin when an individual has a fresh insight about the need to work together more effectively, but sooner or later, everyone on the team has to get involved in the process. Some jump on the wagon with enthusiasm; others are brought along more reluctantly—but everyone on the team has to become a willing partner in the venture. When people bring their best to the team, amazing things can happen. As the Japanese proverb says, “None of us is as smart as all of us.”

CHAPTER 9

HANDLING OPPOSITION

SOONER OR LATER, EVERY GRAND, bold vision encounters significant opposition. We may assume that opposition is always destructive, but it can be a powerful force that crystallizes our imagination, focuses our plans, and drives us to succeed. An airplane uses the opposition of the air to enable it to fly. Millions of us use weights in our exercise program because the resistance makes us stronger. Tests aren't designed to make people fail but to propel them to learn and grow. In the same way, exceptional leaders use opposition as tests to sharpen them and equip them to reach even higher.

I find it helpful to distinguish between resistance and ridicule. Resistance is disagreement, and it often comes in the form of opposition to an idea or a plan, but ridicule is a personal attack. Resistance may be intellectual or procedural, but ridicule has a

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strong emotional component. A person who resists may ask, “I don’t understand why you want to do that.

It doesn’t make sense to me. Would you explain why you want to do it?” But ridicule mocks, “What fool would want to do it that way?” Our response to people depends on our interpretation of their opposition: Are they asking for more information, or are they trying to harm us?

When people push back on my ideas, it causes me to think more clearly and articulate my ideas with more precision. In the process of give and take, I discover who is open to the new information and becomes a partner in the effort—and who doesn’t care how much sense it makes and becomes an adversary. All of us can handle resistance far better than we cope with ridicule. Suffering may make us hard and bitter, but it can make us humble, tender, and wise.

SOURCES OF OPPOSITION

Leaders face opposition from three distinct sources: *procedures*—how things are done; *prerequisites*—why things are done; and *personnel*—who gets things done. If we respond well, our experience of resistance can have benefits in all three areas. We will find better and more creative ideas to accomplish our objectives, better decisions are made because we’ve been forced to consider our reasons for all we do, and more people buy into the systems and processes because they have been part of the process of evaluation and planning. When our people feel heard and understood, they become committed to contribute to the success of the venture.

But ridicule often has the opposite impact. When we feel attacked and accused, we may become defiant, shutting down

any chance for open, creative conversations. Emotions—ours and others’—overwhelm and clog the thinking process, so we react in fear or anger instead of pursuing sound judgments. The intense feelings make us either demanding or passive—or perhaps they even cause us to cycle through both. Resistance may eventually bring people closer, but ridicule often alienates and isolates. And of course, some of those who resist also ridicule, so we experience a double blow.

Ridicule dishonors and demeans us. It has the potential to completely consume us with sleepless nights and worried or furious days. Some of us can’t eat and we lose weight; others of us can’t stop eating. We snap at people we love, and we avoid people who want anything from us. Some of us can’t take it, so we give up and give in, no matter how unreasonable the demands may be.

Others drown themselves in distractions, like gambling, sports, pornography, or other amusements; numb themselves with alcohol or prescription drugs; or hide for hours on social media, to the point of not even showing up for work. But some refuse to back down; they fight back with ferocity, alienating even those who would be allies if the leader spoke the truth with less venom.

We aren’t alone in being ridiculed. At one point, people from Jesus’ hometown discarded him as just “the carpenter’s son” (Matt. 13:55) and powerful leaders insisted he was demon-possessed (Matt. 12:23–24). But Jesus knew perfectly who he was. He was secure in the Father’s love, and he knew why he came to earth. He responded with grit, strength, clarity, and wisdom to every act of resistance and ridicule. His responses to his opponents, especially in John’s gospel, are a model of how to engage adversaries with a blend of truth and grace.

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How can we learn from Jesus' example? The answer isn't to just try harder, a solution that doesn't have lasting effects. We need to look deeper—at the source of Jesus' security and strength. He was thoroughly convinced that the Father adored him and had called him to a mission. No matter what he faced, nothing shook this bedrock truth. His self-concept wasn't based on the opinions of others. He knew what was in the human heart, so he wasn't surprised when some loved him, many feared him, and a few plotted to murder him.

A deep grasp of the love of God and confidence that his purposes never fail give us the foundation of a well-managed ego. With these, we can be confident without being cocky, patient without being passive, determined without being dogmatic, and assertive without being aggressive.

Many of us have been so busy talking about the love of God and driven to share it with more people that we've forgotten what it feels like to know we're cherished by the King of creation. Resistance and ridicule force us to reevaluate the foundation on which we stand. Have we been trusting in our stellar performance and success? Is our supreme value the applause of others? Those are crumbling foundations. In the middle of opposition, we have an opportunity to dig down deeper and find more grace and security than ever before—not because the search is a good thing to do, but because we know we can't make it without a genuine experience of God's unfailing love.

IT COMES WITH THE TERRITORY

Every leader has a target on his or her back. It comes with the job. The bigger the vision, the more people sneer, mock, condemn,

and accuse, and the more at least a few of them try to get in the way to block progress. Banks think we're fools for trying to borrow so much money to build a bigger facility to reach more people, community leaders mock our efforts to make a difference in parts of town others avoid, smart people make fun of us because we try to be clear and simple, and simple people dismiss us because we aren't afraid to explain the magnificent truths of God.

The closer our relationship to these people, the more resistance perplexes us and ridicule hurts us. It can come from our staff—and even from our best friends, our spouses, and our children. No, the problem certainly isn't all people, and not even most of them, but it only takes one tiny grain of sand in an eye to cause great discomfort—and sometimes we face sandstorms!

If we're not careful, all this opposition can erode both our faith in God and our self-confidence. We wake up one morning in a toxic cloud of doubt and assume, "They're probably right. This vision is foolish!" We second-guess what we heard from God, and we second-guess every decision we made from that time forward. Soon we begin whittling away the edges of the vision, downsizing so it doesn't threaten anyone's comfort level—and so no one asks more hard questions. Our strategy becomes appeasement: making others happy with us at all cost. The policy of appeasement weakened Britain and France when they gave in to Hitler before World War II, and it weakens us in our pursuit of God's grand vision for us.

We've examined signs of strain that often occur when we face unrelenting resistance and ridicule. Let me outline a few more. When we feel opposed or attacked, we may . . .

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... insist that others acknowledge we're right, and insist they acknowledge they're wrong! Being right, however, is a poor substitute for being secure, kind, and thoughtful.

... feel compelled to control everything. To feel safe from turmoil caused by others' mistakes (or their creativity), we demand that every decision pass through us.

... nitpick others' decisions, and we excuse our decisions that proved to be misguided.

... label people as good or bad so we can fully accept them or fully discard them. That's easier, it seems, than seeing every person as a complex, multidimensional human being.

... engage in vicious, negative self-talk. We're angry at people, at God, and—maybe most of all—at ourselves.

... relive every important conversation and situation to conduct a thorough postmortem to assign blame. Every little comment or facial expression becomes monumental.

... seldom laugh because everything has the potential to be catastrophic.

... laugh at things that aren't funny.

... have our thoughts and our time consumed with handling the people who resist and ridicule.

... shade the truth—or tell outright lies—to avoid being opposed even more.

... assume we know how each person will respond before every meeting and conversation. Our fearful anticipation puts them and us in rigid boxes.

... begin to see every person as a potential enemy, even those who have been supportive.

. . . forget all about the vision for greater size and speed, and avoid plans for systems and structures because these are the dreams that have led to the nightmare.

When we're under the strain of resistance and ridicule, we often choose exactly the wrong solution: we double down on all these behaviors because they feel so logical and right. We need a better—and a very different— answer. We need to take time to step back, gain some perspective, realize we're digging the hole even bigger by these actions, and go deeper into our source of security and significance. Instead of putting our heads down and running over people who disagree with us, we can walk away for a while, talk to a friend or mentor to get a fresh perspective, and then wade back in with a powerful blend of humility (we don't know it all), love (those people may be acting out of their own insecurities too), and strength (I answer to God, and he will see me through).

In the process of restructuring our souls, we need a few good friends. True friends are on your side, but they're willing to say the hard things you don't want to hear. We don't need people who need us to need them, who will rush in to fix us and make us all better. We need people who are perceptive, are honest, and tell us the truth, no matter how painful it is to hear it. We may want to run away, but a true friend will help us find a way to keep standing. Our friends point out our defense mechanisms and self-destructive patterns of thinking and acting. They may not offer comfort—at least at first—but we need people like this to tell us the truth so we can clarify our choices.

Friends show us that opposition, and even genuine failure, isn't the end of the world. They remind us we've enrolled in a graduate program to learn life's most important lessons. All leaders walk this path of resistance and ridicule, and the great ones come out

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on the other side stronger and wiser. How can we know if we've learned these lessons? At least one sure benchmark is our willingness to listen to people who used to annoy us. With a new depth of humility, we respect those at the lowest level of our organizations, and we value—but not necessarily agree with—the opinions of those who oppose us. We move toward those people so we can engage them, and we try to understand their point of view more than insisting they understand ours. For this to happen, we need to shut up, give eye contact, and ask plenty of good questions. Listening to others builds trust, just as insisting on our own way erodes trust. We may not win them to our side of the argument, but at least we have a better chance of both sides walking away from the conversation with less anger, a little more understanding, and perhaps an open door for the next talk.

CHAPTER 10

NAVIGATING PAIN

PAIN IS INEVITABLE. Pain incubates. Pain is indifferent. The way we interpret and respond to pain throws us into a gear that propels us forward or backward. While pain itself is indifferent, it never has an indifferent effect. Pain will shift you one way or the other. We all have a default mode of dealing with pain: fight, flight, or freeze. It's the way we've dealt with conflicts, threats, fears, and loss all our lives, but our default mode may not be a productive, healthy way to handle pain any longer. Now it's time to change.

Change only happens when our level of desire (or actually desperation) rises above the level of our fears. Pain is a watershed: it can cause us to shrink back into a hole and hope it goes away, or it can galvanize new hopes, new plans, and new passions to learn the lessons it can teach us.

Facing pain may require more courage than we've ever had in our lives. At many different points—maybe even today—I can

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guarantee that you will reach the threshold of your pain and think, *I've had it! That's all I can take. Get me out of here!* But it's not over. You've simply turned the next page in your life's story of excellent leadership. You're at this moment because you have successfully navigated many types of hurt, loss, grief, betrayal, and complexity. You've raised your pain threshold many times in the past. It's time to raise it again.

COMMON TO US ALL

The pain you experience isn't unique. Countless leaders in churches, nonprofit organizations, and businesses have suffered the same kinds of hurts and confusion. The answer isn't to try to construct a life that is pain free. That won't happen in this life. Only dead people—and resurrected people—feel no pain.

Leadership necessarily involves pain. The higher you push your pain threshold, the more pain you'll experience. It's true in every field. Look at the photos of U.S. presidents on the day they took office and the day they left. The strains and pains of leading the free world turn their hair gray and put bags under their eyes. The problem isn't poverty. They live pampered lives. They have on-site medical care, the best nutrition, their own plane, and outstanding staff to perform every assigned task. But the pain takes a toll. We may complain that the weight of the world is on our shoulders, but it is literally on theirs.

Hopefully, the principles and perceptions in this book have helped you to understand the power of pain to destroy and build up, but even more, I hope you've gotten some insights about your responses to different types of pain. You have choices. And all choices are consequential. At some point, you'll stop seeing pain

as the enemy and make peace with it. Like Paul, you'll see pain as a surprising source of strength. God's power, Paul learned, "is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Paul was under no illusions about the difficulties believers face. Just as Christ suffered, his people are called to suffer too. In a letter to the Corinthians, Paul gave a glimpse of God's purposes for our past, present, and future. We are "unadorned clay pots" containing "God's incomparable power" in us. With this brutal realism and steadfast hope, we can find God's heart even in the deepest darkness. Paul explained,

We've been surrounded and battered by troubles, but we're not demoralized; we're not sure what to do, but we know that God knows what to do; we've been spiritually terrorized, but God hasn't left our side; we've been thrown down, but we haven't broken. What they did to Jesus, they do to us—trial and torture, mockery and murder; what Jesus did among them, he does in us—he lives! Our lives are at constant risk for Jesus' sake, which makes Jesus' life all the more evident in us. While we're going through the worst, you're getting in on the best! (2 Corinthians 4:7-12, MSG)

When we experience the goodness and greatness of God in our most painful moments, people around us—family and friends, believers and unbelievers, strangers and enemies—notice and are amazed at the presence of Christ in us!

But that's not all. Paul doesn't just look at the painful past or the purposeful present; he also points to a glorious future. No matter how much heartache we endure, we have hope that God will make sense of it all. He concluded:

So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his

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unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18, MSG)

When we believe this—not just in our words but in the depths of our hearts—we'll be able to withstand far more pain. Our threshold will rise, and we'll be far better leaders.

EXPECT EVEN MORE

Do you want to be strong in God's grace and power? Make peace with the pain God sends your way. Recognize it as a springboard for growth and a platform for greater effectiveness. You'll need it. God has much more in store for you.

In sports, when teams get to the play-offs, the games that really matter, many players are suffering the greatest pains of the season. In every sport—the NBA, the NFL, the World Cup, MLB, and in all sports at all levels of competition—players are battered at the end of the regular season. But now they stand on the precipice of a championship. They've played hard for months, and they're nicked, bruised, strained, and even broken—but they've dreamed and worked hard to make the play-offs. They wouldn't miss it for the world! Even in the play-offs, they may not be in bad shape for the first game, but each game multiplies their injuries. By the time they get to the championship game, many of them can barely walk. But they keep playing, refusing to be taken out. They lay it all on the line for the goal of winning a trophy.

Are we playing for anything less? Paul compared our willingness to endure the pain of following Christ to the pain of athletic

discipline: “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever” (1 Corinthians 9:24-25).

This perspective doesn’t minimize the pain we endure as leaders. It puts it in context. Paul sometimes went into elaborate detail to describe how he had suffered, and Luke tells us much more about the beatings, torture, and opposition he witnessed as he followed Paul on his journeys. The pain is intense. There’s no denying that. But another layer of meaning is added: God is using it, even if it makes no sense at the time, for a greater purpose.

THE CRUCIBLE OF HUMILITY

This leadership journey can often be lonely, so we need to make sure we find at least a pain partner or two to help us carry the load. When we feel burdened and alone, we become either pitiful or furious—and some of us can be both in the same hour. We need someone to remind us that pain is inevitable, incubates, and is indifferent and that God is raising our pain threshold so we can be even more effective.

Self-pity isn’t humility. It’s the opposite of humility. It screams for people to look at us and notice how much we’ve suffered. Humility is the bedrock security that doesn’t demand or expect applause or recognition. The essence of genuine humility isn’t thinking less of ourselves but thinking of ourselves less. Pain has the power to crush us, but what’s left in the bottom of the crucible? Is it someone who is angry, resentful, and self-absorbed, or is it

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someone who has met Christ there, experienced his grace in a new way, and been transformed and freed by the encounter with pain?

When we think of powerful leaders, perhaps the last character quality we imagine is humility. History is punctuated by leaders at the helm of military conquests, political revolutions, and industrial advances who changed nations and the world. Machiavelli's famous quote is, "It's better to be feared than loved." Raw power, though, has its limitations, especially for those who aspire to be spiritual leaders.

For leaders the choice isn't between being powerful or weak; the choice is between using your talents to exploit people for your own ends or to use them for the greater good. Leaders who are both powerful and humble are rare, but they have a profound impact on everyone in their organization. They value each person from the lowest cleaning staff to the executive suite. This is the kind of leader people love to follow. This is the kind of leader they believe in even when times are tough. This is the kind of leader who marshals the efforts of everyone to accomplish more than anyone dreamed possible. This kind of leadership begins with humility.

PAYING IT FORWARD

Those around you are sponges soaking up your attitudes about life. Your spouse and children, your friends, your team, your church members, your neighbors, and your community are eager to see how you handle the many pains life and leadership throw at you. For them, you are a sentinel of hope—not of perfection but of the genuine hope that a mere mortal can suffer terribly and come out on the other side with more joy, love, and purpose than ever before. We desperately need people with this kind of hope. The

path through the storms may be dark and confusing, but we can trust that God is with us, holding our hands even when we don't sense his presence.

Don't run from your pain. Don't deny it exists. It's the most effective leadership development tool the world has ever known. You'll grow only to the threshold of your pain, so raise it!

