

Leading Transformation

A Travel Free Learning Article

By

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Some people collect antique post cards or Depression era glass, I collect leadership quotes. One quote by business guru Peter Drucker remains my all-time favorite: “No organization can rise above the level of its leadership.”

As applied to congregational transformation: no congregation can rise above the spiritual leadership level of its pastor and core key leaders. Jesus’ wilderness temptation is a classic description of the dynamics that distract leaders from leading out from their soul. They are threefold: 1. Purloining leadership privileges for personal prerogative. 2. Presuming our own PR protects us from gravity. 3. Arrogation of power.

A transformational interpretation might be: quick as we often are to prescribe Jesus’ use of Scripture as the way to rise above temptation, we can rise no higher, nor lead our temptation-tossed congregations beyond the measure of grace provided through our own personal practice of Scripture. Transformational work in established congregations is tough enough organizationally; without the lift of daily Scripture and prayer, it simply never gets off the ground. The high calling of the core spiritual leadership team—pastors and key leaders yoked in ministry partnership—is to witness and model the authenticity of leading out of the depths of where we really live with God.

Thoughtful examination of the content of all the current major transformational processes available in today’s church market reveals that the key on the ground ingredient remains: Scripture and prayer. I am slowly beginning to gather that depth must be related to height.

One helpful way to frame the ongoing conversation in the leadership circle around spiritual depth is to ask: what is anchoring your soul these days? And then slow down the freight-train agenda and take the time to listen deeply and respond authentically to one another, out of where we each live in the heart of God. While some experts in church transformation might find this concept simplistic and wasteful of valuable training time, I know of no other way to bind our hearts in spiritual agreement around the core shared vision. To reach the heights together, we must plumb the depths as well. I am not recommending some sort of sordid psychiatric exhibitionism, but if we don’t know where our core leaders are coming from spiritually, how can we co-lead to new levels?

Are there some practices and principles that might help us better lead out of our own depths? Here in random order are just a few that come to mind.

1. **Go with the Slow Flow.** Spiritual leadership flows out of our real life in the Spirit; it effervesces out of our core being before God. *No life? Equals No Flow! No Flow? Equals No Go!* The grit of corporate traction and the grit of organizational momentum are grounded here. This principle is so absurdly simple I blow right past it regularly in my own quest for new formulas, techniques and gimmicks. The call is to deliberately slow down and not skip this step.

2. **Stewarded Use of Spiritual Gifts.** Many transformational paradigms offer a spiritual gift inventory as the means to equip workers. Identification of multiple gifts often translates into multitudinous assignments. What would happen if we agreed among the core leadership circle: “let’s take on one major mission assignment at a time; oh, and one fun one!” Given that many gifted leaders have a real life beyond the congregation, when life simply intrudes upon them, they are hard pressed. Unless we are talking about leaders with super-power capacities and extraordinarily hardy constitutions, the stewarded

use of spiritual gifts, by some mutually agreed-upon limit, helps safeguard morale and lessens burnout factors.

3. **Doing the Work Only You Can Do.** This means scheduling a block of time every week for what Stephen Covey calls “A” Quadrant Work. Spiritual vision work is a task only we as the key spiritual leader can do. If we are not leading with vibrant, vital vision, constantly lifting our souls to the Lord for freshness; how can we expect high level followership? Let’s just confess here that we often fall victim to the tyranny of the urgent task. Congregational life involves occasional pastoral emergencies, but we are easily seduced into becoming the congregation’s spiritual concierge or just a quivering mass of pastoral availability and this indulgence knocks us off center from the “A” work that is ours alone to do. If we do not do this work, we’re actually holding everyone else up.

4. **Perfection or Continuous Transformation?** The constant expectation of perfection in leadership is overrated, because it always ends up being all about me. Expect mess-ups, but let’s keep our fess-ups equally fresh! Do we have a simple way to get ourselves back on the path? Here are some thoughts on forgiveness: keep short accounts; beware of bitterness and let go of grievances; frequently plead for mercy for ourselves and those around us; honor the grace that comes our way by accepting it; quit focusing on faults, flaws, and foibles. Ask instead: where is the victory?

Transformational leadership requires innovation and formation. Formation finds ancient paths offer timely and timeless help. Gerald May updates Brother Lawrence’s “Practicing the Presence” in his book ***The Awakened Heart*** which is an excellent place to begin paying attention to the personal soul practices that lead transformational team leaders and churches o ‘the next level.

Important Things to Know

Gary Straub is a Ministry Colleague with The Columbia Partnership. The Columbia Partnership is a non-profit Christian ministry organization focused on transforming the capacity of the North American Church to pursue and sustain Christ-centered ministry. ***Travel Free Learning*** is a knowledge sharing emphasis. For more information about products and services check out the web site at www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org, send an e-mail to Client.Care@TheColumbiaPartnership.org, or call 803.622.0923.