



The Senior Pastor's Guide to Leading Staff



1

A Brief Introduction

Church members may not understand all you do, but if you're a senior pastor, you're a part of a fraternity. A highly committed, over-worked, eternity-minded fraternity of people who lead a local church.

It's rewarding to be a pastor. But make no mistake about it, the job is hard. Peter Drucker, the late leadership guru, said that the four hardest jobs in America are:

- The President of the United States
- A university president
- A CEO of a hospital
- A pastor of a local church

That's a pretty amazing list. But when you dive into what pastors do each day, it starts to make sense.

THERE ARE GREAT DEMANDS ON YOUR TIME

Being a senior pastor is not a 9 to 5 job. From time to time, God wakes you up in the middle of the night with someone on your heart or an idea to reach people far

from God. And while you're usually not angry when God disturbs your schedule, let's be honest, the Holy Spirit isn't always convenient.

On top of that, it's often church people who want more and more of your time, sometimes disrespecting any semblance of boundaries. People pull you in many different directions, and that puts considerable demands on your schedule. And your family.

YOU FACE CONSTANT CRITICISM AND CONFLICT

Rev. Dr. Ken Fong, senior pastor at Evergreen Baptist Church in Rosemead, California says, "Being a pastor is like death by a thousand paper cuts."

Maybe it's the deacons. Maybe it's a disgruntled church member. Or maybe it's team members with different ideologies or visions for ministry.

Church conflicts can take on a mind of their own, maybe even fueled by the enemy. It's serious business.





THE JOB DESCRIPTION IS DIVERSE

I'm not sure the Apostle Paul would be qualified to be the pastor at a 50-person church based on some of the job descriptions I've seen.

One day you're doing sermon prep, the next day you're counseling and visiting, and the next day you're leading a staff. You're expected to be a masterful communicator, empathetic counselor, and brilliant leader with the skill of a politician thrown in for good luck. At times, it's hard to tell what's really most important.

YOU OFTEN FEEL ALONE

One of the biggest reasons being a senior pastor is so tough is because it can be a lonely role.

Sermon preparation is typically done alone. You go into an office and come out with a word from the Lord. It's a private process. If you're not careful, you'll insulate yourself from people in your church, even from the people you're leading.

YOU CARRY THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

As a senior pastor, you're doing work that has eternal significance. It's not just your job and your paycheck,

it's your ministry and your calling. You're the shepherd of a flock of people. With families and souls.

It's up to you to champion the mission and vision of the church. You've got to make sure the church is being a good steward and has money to grow. You've got to lead a team of others, developing them from scratch if need be. People are looking to you to lead them, even when they aren't there.

BUT DESPITE ALL OF THE CHALLENGES, YOU LOVE WHAT YOU DO

You're called to lead. You're committed to lead. You are determined to preach the gospel, pray for people, invite people to church and build leaders.

And you're going to make a difference.

Being a pastor means your ultimate reward is in heaven. But while you're here on earth, we want you to know we stand with you. We're here to equip you with practical tools to help you lead your church to healthy growth. We're here to support, encourage, and resource you as you lead.

This book will help you lead people—one of the most difficult tasks of pastoral leadership. You'll find practical ideas and tools for leading both staff and volunteers. So if you're ready to take your leadership to the next level, read on.



2

Leading Your Staff

We've worked with hundreds of churches and we've learned that most senior pastors fill three roles at the same time.

First, there's the role of **PREACHER**. Every week, you have the opportunity to deliver a sermon that helps people follow Jesus. It's no small task and it's full of potential. You may never have enough time to work on your message, but you know it's important.

Second, there's the need to **PASTOR**. A preacher and a pastor are two different things, and you might need to change hats mid-week. Or even mid-day. If all you had to do was prepare a creative, biblical, and excellent message every week, you would succeed. But ministry is far more messy because it involves people. You're not just their preacher, you're their pastor.

Third, you're the **LEADER**. This is one of the most critical markers of a successful Senior Pastor. When you look at healthy, growing churches, you'll find a senior pastor who is a gifted leader. Leadership is the

number one growth barrier in most churches. It's the silent killer of health and growth. And it's one of your biggest opportunities.

Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck warn us that "a failure to equip people for ministry results in an unhealthy church." Yet most churches admit they have no strategy for developing leaders in their church. Even though Ephesians 4:12 is clear that pastors are to equip people to do the work of the ministry, not do all the ministry alone, pastors still needlessly bear the weight of all the tasks of church.

At Church Fuel, we have resources to help you be a better preacher and a better pastor. But in this book, we're focusing on the leadership aspect. And in this section, we're going to focus on leading your staff.

You might have a large staff, a small staff, or a staff made up of volunteers. No matter your staff makeup, the ideas in this section will help you get your team on the same page and all moving in the right direction.



Clarify Everyone's Role

Whether your team consists of volunteers, part-time staff, or full-time leaders, one of the most critical things you can do for people is provide clarity. The senior leader is the chief clarity officer of the church. You've got to provide clarity around the mission, vision, and direction of the church. That's organizational clarity.

But you've also got to provide clarity for every person on your team. This is individual clarity.

You've got to help people know what really matters, and what things do matter most. They can't have three most important things—they have to know what is the *most* important.

They need you to say, "This is where you add the most value" and "of all the things you do, this is the most important thing."

I'm not talking about a job description listing 42 things, the last one being something ridiculous like "other duties as necessary." Those kind of documents provide no practical value. I'm talking about providing an insane amount of clarity about what really matters.

In 2013, Andy Stanley talked about this process at The Catalyst Conference. He said one of the most helpful things leaders can do is boil down someone's job into one simple but powerful statement. He says it's time-consuming work, but the results are magic.

Andy shared his one sentence job description. "Inspire our staff and congregations to remain fully

engaged in our mission and strategy." That's so much better than the long-document listing dozens and dozens of responsibilities. Clarity comes in simple statements not in long lists.

He shared this one, created for the CFO of Northpoint: "Create, implement, and monitor systems that ensure our organization remains fiscally secure." That's a clear job description. Sure, there are a lot of tasks and responsibilities that go into the job, but this one statement provides necessary clarity. If the CFO designed an excellent logo or oversaw a team of greeters, that might be helpful. But fiscal security is the main thing.

I absolutely love the one sentence job description created for his administrative assistant: "To keep Andy's path clear of nonessential tasks and decisions so that he can do what only he can do."

People do not drift into clarity.

Time will not help them become more focused. In fact, the opposite is true. The more your people work in the church, the more "other" responsibilities they will pick up. Like a magnet, they will gravitate to things they care about, whether those things are on their job description or critical to their success. Because they love the church they will pick up additional tasks. These won't be bad things, but they won't be crucial things.

The senior leader is the chief clarity officer of the church.





It's up to you to create a culture where the "main thing" is continually defined and refined. Andy says it like this, "You must clarify the win for every staff and volunteer position. When you clarify the win, it becomes the magnetic north for the energy and get-it-done doers of the organization. When you don't define the win, each individual will define it for themselves."

Do you see how much focus and clarity comes from knowing the *one thing* that sums up someone's role on the staff team?

Take it all and boil it down to a tweet. If you can't tell someone what they do and why it matters in 140 characters, keep working. Once you create these statements, think of how you can continually reinforce them.

Clarify Goals

Vince Lombardi, legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, said, "Once you've established the goals you want and the price you are willing to pay, you can ignore the minor hurts, the opponent's pressure, and the temporary setbacks."

There's a tremendous power in setting and working toward goals. That's why I'm a big believer in working as a team to set church-wide annual goals.


When everyone on a church staff knows where they're going, there's clarity and alignment and often, success. "You won't do ministry that really matters until you define what matters," says Aubrey Malphurs of The Malphurs Group.

Not only does a church need goals, each person on the staff needs goals. Just like church-wide goals keep an organization on track, individual goals will help a team member focus on the right things. Setting goals and keeping them in front of you can make a big difference.

My friend Matt once told me that the best way he knows to lead and manage people in a growing church is to help them set goals, then work with them to create a plan to reach those goals, and holding people accountable to reach the goals they set.

Here's a great question you can ask your staff: "What do you want to see God do in the next year?" Sometimes, you get generic answers. A student pastor might say, "We just want God to show up" or "We want to see students follow Jesus with their lives." Those are great things.

It's up to you to create a culture where the "main thing" is continually defined and refined.



What do you want to see
God do in your ministry
and in your leadership?

God is certainly free to do what He wants, but imagine the synergy of casting vision and setting goals around the mission. What would happen if that student pastor set a goal of engaging ten passionate, committed, and trained adult leaders who will lead students to follow Jesus with their lives? The first is a desire. The second is a goal.

Goal setting is more like goal crafting. You should work with people on your team to help them set goals for their ministry. “What do you want to see God do in your ministry and in your leadership?” is a powerful question every leader should ask each person on their team.

As you pray and discuss, a preferred vision for the future takes shape. You’re free to have conversations rooted in reality about what it’s going to take to reach a goal.

*It’s really important to set goals **with** your team, not **for** your team.*

If you hand goals to a team member, they might resent that. Over time, they might get a little passive aggressive, or feel like they’re working to accomplish your vision. But when you work with someone to set these goals and create a plan to accomplish them, they invite you into the accountability process.

You’re leading them and holding them accountable in areas where they had input. They won’t resent your leadership because you’re helping them to accomplish their goals.



GREAT GOALS ARE:

1 SPECIFIC

"Improve the service" isn't a good goal, because it's not specific. "Recruit three more members for the usher team" is a specific goal. If your church wide priority is to raise the bar on discipleship, how many small group leaders are you going to train? If your church wide priority is to involve more people in generosity, how many new first time donors are you going to reach? If your church wide priority is to become more intentional with guests, how many first-time guest cards are you going to process this year? When you set goals, make sure they're specific and not generic.

2 MEASURABLE

"Do better" or "Get more volunteers" is tough to measure. How many new volunteers do you need to involve? What percentage of total giving do you want to see come in electronically? Write goals that are measurable, so you'll know how you're doing. Goals also need to have a time limit. "Recruit three new volunteers by Easter" is specific and measurable. When you set goals, work hard to make them measurable.

3 ATTAINABLE

Goals need to challenge and stretch you, but they also need to be realistic. Resist setting unrealistic goals that are thrown out the window as soon as it looks like they won't be reached. Make sure you stretch yourself, but set goals that are within reason.

Does each person on your team have 3-5 specific, measurable, and attainable goals? Do they fit the overall strategy and plan for the church? Are you meeting with them and helping them accomplish them?

At Church Fuel, we teach something called "The Grow Healthy Process." It's a seven-step framework for church leadership resulting in a clear plan you can follow to lead your church to the healthy kind of growth we all want. The Grow Healthy Process is like an operating system for your computer. It's the code base that allows programs to run effectively. It doesn't DO much, but it really enables everything. I'm bringing this up because the first step in the Grow Healthy Process is *clarity*.

We help leaders clarify who their church is, who they are trying to reach, what they really do, and where they are going. After that, we help them align every single ministry to that master plan. Then we get into meetings, systems and processes.

But it all starts with clarity.



Streamline Meetings

Have you ever sat through a meeting and thought, “Why am I here?” Do your meetings lead to a lot of talk and only a little action? If you sent an email to your team saying the next staff meeting was optional, how many people would attend?

Most team meetings aren’t effective because they don’t focus on what’s important. You rarely have time to talk about the mission, vision, values and long-term strategy because you’re responding to what happened last week. You don’t spend much time talking about how to improve your ministry because you’re responding to last week’s crisis.

This is one reason most meetings stink.

What’s the purpose of your meeting?

One of the most important things to clarify about meetings is their actual purpose. Regularly scheduled meetings without a clear purpose or objective tend to waste everyone’s time. There are actually four types of meetings you should have with your team.

1. THE INFORMATION MEETING

The purpose of this meeting is to communicate important information. Of course, you’ll want to be prepared with notes, handouts, slides and anything else you need to get your point across.

But here’s the key question:
Do you really need to meet?

There might be a more effective way to communicate information. Why not shoot a simple video and send it to everyone? Why not write the information in an email or memo?

If you’re distributing information one way, there might be a more effective and efficient way to do it.

If your weekly staff meetings are filled with information, move them to every other week. Or cancel them. Replace them with a more effective way to communicate information.

2. THE BRAINSTORMING MEETING

These meetings are think-tanks with lots of open-ended questions and whiteboard dreaming. You’re not communicating information and you’re not developing full solutions. You’re just thinking. These meetings are incredibly valuable for improvement and excellence.

Most meetings aren’t effective because they don’t focus on what’s important.



But here's the key question: Do you have the right participants?

You need more WOW people than HOW people in these kind of meetings. If you have too many people that jump right to execution, you'll kill the spirit of the room.

3. THE DECISION MAKING MEETING

The purpose of this meeting is clear . . . decision making. Start this meeting with a statement like this: "The purpose of today's meeting is to make a decision about X."

Here's the key question: Is everyone prepared?

People participating in a decision making meeting need to have all the information in advance, including costs, projections, alternatives, and examples. As a leader, work hard to prepare everyone so you're not doing research in this type of meeting. Sure, discussion and debate should be lively, but a group of prepared people need to make a decision.

4. STRATEGIC MEETINGS

Most strategic meetings aren't effective because they don't focus on what's important.

You rarely have time to talk about the mission, vision, values, and long-term strategy because you're responding to what happened last week. You don't spend much time talking about how to improve your product because you're responding to last week's crisis.

We had this same problem a few years ago. That's when we learned a meeting strategy from a major corporation, who had adopted it from a book by Verne Harnish. We shifted all our strategic meetings to this format, and our meetings started producing results.

We started with an *annual retreat*.


We went away for two nights and three days for annual planning. We looked back on the first day and ahead on the second day. We came up with annual priorities—big things we should accomplish that would make us better. After we had priorities nailed down, we set goals.

The *quarterly retreat* kept us focused.

Once we had the annual direction set, we came back every quarter and focused on it. In my opinion, this was the secret sauce. The quarterly retreat was one day shorter, but it was just as important. We looked back on the last quarter and talked about wins and losses, then we looked ahead to the next quarter. Essentially, we took the big goal and broke it down into something we could accomplish that quarter. One annual objective, but four quarterly steps. Our team left this retreat knowing what we were going to do in the coming months. Not only was the meeting focused on what was important, we left knowing how to focus on what was important.

Imagine what would happen to
your team if you did something
like this.





I failed to realize this important lesson: leadership involves people, not just paper.

Have Intentional Conversations

In 2006, when I was doing the legwork that would lead to the launch of a brand new church, I spent a lot of time creating strategies and systems. I wrote every word on our website. I drew up some pretty charts.

And all of those things, while foundational, did not directly result in one person joining our launch team or showing up to our grand opening service. Nobody ever showed up at church with a printout of something from our website claiming that our stance on the Holy Spirit is what drew them in.

You see, a computer screen is my comfort zone. And I like my desk. I'd be perfectly happy behind a closed door surrounded by books and connected to blogs. Such is the life of an introvert.

But my personality quickly turned into an obstacle, and I failed to realize this important lesson: Leadership involves people, not just paper.

While strategies are helpful (in fact, I believe they are essential), I allowed myself to get lost in them and missed the bigger picture. Relationships slipped away as a digital presence grew and grew. And with every social media status update, my real leadership influence actually decreased.



A memo never changed the world. I know someone will bring up that memo that Jerry Maguire wrote, which was more like a mission statement, but that's a movie.

Volunteers are not going to be developed via Twitter. You can put out a Twitter APB for small group leaders, and someone may respond. But frequent calls for help is a sign that there isn't a culture built on relationship and mission.

You cannot make disciples via Facebook. You can find out what Jonas brother you are most like, or join the pirate army in the fight against the Sith Lords or maybe even discuss that obscure Old Testament passage in the One Hundred Million Christians Strong Studying the Old Testament Group, but for all the social that Facebook brings to media, life isn't going to happen there. It might be a foggy window into life, but it's not real life.

If you are going to make a difference, it's going to involve conversations. You're going to have to push back from your desk, leave the confines of your keyboard, go out there and talk to people.

Stop sending emails to groups of ten people hoping for one response and take one person out for a cup of coffee.

SCHEDULE A ONE-ON-ONE

One of the most effective things you can do to lead your team is to sit down with them on a regular basis and talk. Set down all the calendars and plans and forms, and just have a conversation. Grab a cup of coffee. If you're Presbyterian, order two glasses of wine. If you're Southern Baptist, make it sweet tea.

I kid, I kid.

But seriously, there is absolutely no substitute for real conversations with the people on your team. Put it on the calendar, and turn it into a standing appointment. If you have a small team, do it once a month. If you have a larger team with a little more structure, make sure it happens at every level.

And when you have these conversations, can I suggest you ask two simple but powerful questions? When senior pastors ask these two questions from people on their team, it opens up so many great things:

*Where do you need me more?
Where do you need me less?*

Many times, staff members want their pastor to be more involved in their ministry. Maybe they don't really know what's going on. Maybe they don't see the stories or understand the struggle. Give your staff permission to invite you into their world. Maybe they need you to introduce them to a mentor, or give them some resources. Ask the question and listen, really listen, to their response.





Other times, your staff might provide honest feedback that goes the other way. Maybe you're not giving them enough freedom to lead. Maybe you're micro-managing. Maybe they need less of your involvement in a particular area. This can be tough to hear, but if you're hearing it, it's a good thing.

When you ask these questions (and truly listen to their response), you're leading at a high level. This chapter isn't complicated, but that doesn't mean it's simple. Leadership like this is incredibly inefficient, because it's one-on-one. But I promise it's far more effective.

Learn Together

When I talk to pastors and church leaders, most of them tell me they want to be a better leader. Leadership is one of those really important things. I believe it's actually the #1 growth barrier in most churches. It's not style, service times, or campuses . . . it's leadership.

Leadership is like the tide. When it rises, everything else rises with it.

If you become a better leader, it will improve every ministry, every program, and every relationship in your church. If everyone in your church learns how to lead better, the entire church will benefit.

Leadership is like the tide.
When it rises, everything else
rises with it.

Almost all pastors know this. But when I look under the hood, there's nothing on their task list or calendar to back up this claim. The desire is there but the action is absent.

Leadership development is one of those things that will get bumped from your calendar every time. The conference will never be convenient. The book sitting on your desk right now is going to get covered up with other things begging for your time. You won't have time for any of this.

WHEN YOUR TEAM ISN'T ON THE SAME PAGE

A focused team is an amazing blessing, but more often than not, the entire team isn't on the same page. And it sure is easy to tell when things aren't clicking.

In fact, that's one of the most common behind-the-scenes issues we see when we work with church teams.





When your staff isn't on the same page . . .

- There are competing agendas.
- There is back-room complaining.
- Micromanaging becomes the management method.
- There's tension everywhere.

Getting your team on the same page might not seem like the most pressing issue, but it's costing you more than you know. Without a focused and aligned group of leaders, you're never going to accomplish all God wants you to do.

If you find yourself with a team that's not on the same page, what do you do? How can you walk everyone through a process that results in focused unity?

Here are five things you can do:

1. Take responsibility.

Fake performance reviews or just piling on additional expectations won't change anything at this point. That will be perceived as micromanaging and heavy-handed. Besides, misalignment is mostly the fault of the leader. If you're the leader, you're responsible for

your team being on the same page. Don't blame your team . . . lead them.

At Church Fuel, we talk about the senior pastor as the Chief Clarity Officer for the organization. You've got to clarify everyone's roles, because they pick up other responsibilities and easily drift off focus. You've got to clarify goals because there will be times when everything seems like priority one.

Nobody else will do this. It's up to you.

2. Make it a goal to get on the same page.

I know you have programs, products, campaigns and a slew of other things going on. But if your team isn't on the same page, it's time to hit the pause button.

Instead of just plowing through all the regular work, carve out focused time and energy to get on the same page. It's not going to happen through your regular schedule and with your regular meetings. If you want to get on the same page, you need to clear the calendar and make it a major focus over the next few months. Your first great decision as a leader is deciding to focus on this.

The goal of getting on the same page might not sound as spiritual as reaching the lost for Christ, but the first goal facilitates the second.

If you're the leader, you're responsible for your team being on the same page.





You can't lead this process from behind a desk or behind a computer. It's going to take lots of conversations, lots of listening, and lots of work.

3. Commit to more conversations.

Text messages and emails aren't going to work here. You're going to have to schedule meetings—in the office and over coffee—and work hard on this. We can help you, but you're going to have to put your head down and get going.

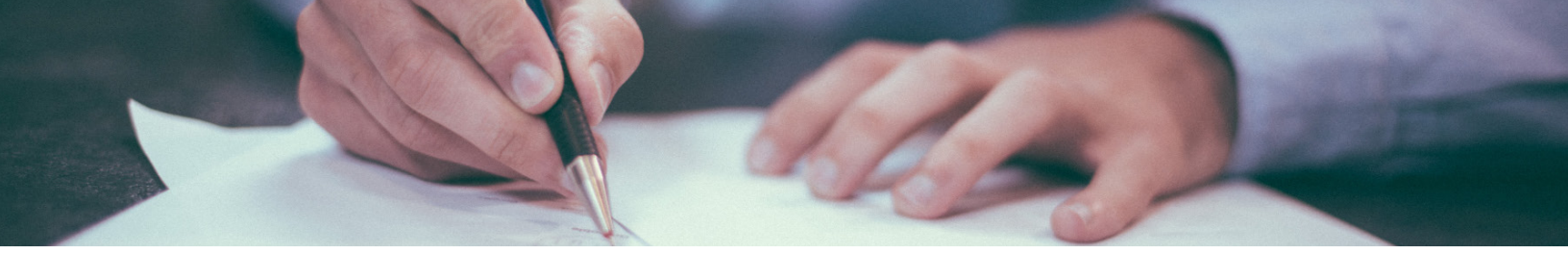
You can't lead this process from behind a desk or behind a computer. It's going to take lots of conversations, lots of listening, and lots of work. Honestly, this is why most leaders don't have a team on the same page . . . it's easier to just let things go and meagerly manage results.

Rewriting the job description . . . communicating expectations . . . sharing (or refining) your philosophy . . . all of these start with conversations, not emails or staff meetings.

4. Work together to create an actual page.

Your conversations will open the door to clarity. And just when you feel like you've talked about everything, it's time to make decisions.

Getting your staff on the same page has got to end with creating a few real pages. The first page you need is a real job description. No more ridiculous bullets or wishful thinking. No more responsibilities that don't really matter. No more "other duties as required." It's time for a real job description.



An effective job description should:

CONTAIN A ONE-SENTENCE SUMMARY OF THE ROLE

If you can't summarize the role in one memorable sentence that makes sense, keep working on it.

LIST REAL DUTIES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

It's not overly important to list everything that *could* possibly be done, but it's critical that you include what *must* be done.

INCLUDE NUMBERS, GOALS, AND METRICS

This is the secret sauce to any job profile. It's where you clarify expectations and set goals. You can't measure effectiveness without this.

BE REGULARLY REVIEWED

Say goodbye to the job descriptions that go in a file or live in a computer. This new job description is going to be talked about every few months. Because it's real.

5. Get help.

If you've got a team who isn't on the same page, you probably need outside help.

Getting help is not a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength.

Bringing in help isn't admitting you don't know what to do; it's about being intentional and focused on something that is extremely important. It says to the team, "Clarity for all of us is important and it's not going to come by just trying harder."

When I look back at the organizations I led (a church and an INC 5000 company), major breakthroughs always came when we sought outside help to help us go to the next level. Compared to the resulting focus and growth, the investment ended up being minimal.

If you're leading a team that's not on the same page, you're working much harder to get results that are less than spectacular. Get someone to come in and help you align everything and get everyone on the same page.





“Nothing so conclusively proves
a man’s ability to lead others
as what he does from day to day
to lead himself.”

THOMAS J. WATSON
1874-1956
PRESIDENT OF IBM

3

Leading Yourself

The second hardest people I lead are my kids.

Why is it that I can inspire other people to take massive action, but I can't get my kids to be nice to each other? Or clean their rooms?

But the hardest person I lead is myself.

I want to be a great leader. Well-informed. Well-respected. Confident and trusted.

But too many times, I fall short.

I ask people to do what I don't do well myself, often expecting what I don't model.

We live in a two-story house in Atlanta, with all the kids bedrooms upstairs. We have a rule in our house that we don't yell from the upstairs to the downstairs, or vice versa. If one of the kids needs something, they are supposed to walk in the other room and ask like a

civilized person.

As you can imagine, this rule is more of a guideline really. There's way more yelling than I care to admit.

And one more than one occasion, I've yelled back: "HEY, DON'T YELL FROM THE UPSTAIRS TO THE DOWNSTAIRS."

Here I am, expecting what I'm not modeling. Trying to get others to do the right thing while doing the wrong thing in the process.

What kind of example is that? Why in the world would I try to keep my kids from a specific behavior by exhibiting that very same behavior.

The Apostle Paul said, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."

I get that, because I live that.





Leading others doesn't start with others at all . . . It starts by working hard on myself.

That's why the hardest person I will ever lead is myself. Not a paid staff. Not a group of volunteers. Not a committee or a team.

Me.

Leading others doesn't start with others at all. It doesn't start by clarifying expectations, setting goals, asking questions, or casting vision.

It starts by working hard on myself.

It starts with getting my own house in order.

Now the good news is there are more resources than ever before to help me become a better leader. And if you want to lead at a higher level, these resources are available to you.

Simon Sinek can spend years researching, outlining, and writing an incredible leadership book called *Leaders Eat Last*. But I can purchase a copy for less than \$20 and get free shipping. What took years to write and thousands of dollars to create, I can get for next to nothing. And there are hundreds of other

well-researched, well-written, top-quality leadership books. Many of these represent people's life work. For the cost of a couple of meals, you can purchase valuable content that took thousands of hours to create.

A great leader like Carey Nieuwhof can spend hours arranging guests, conducting interviews and putting together a leadership podcast. With a couple of clicks, I can access this incredible resource for free. He's done all this work and I can listen at no cost. This is amazing. And that's just one of the amazing podcasts available to you for free on the Internet.

Then there are conferences like Leadercast and the Global Leadership Summit. Months of event planning and production go into an event. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent on content and I can access it all for a few hundred bucks. Other people have done all the hard work, putting together a program you could never produce on your own, and you can attend.

If you want to become a better leader, help is out there. It's not hidden. It's in plain sight.





Too Much Noise

Ironically, it's the plethora of resources that make it tough to take action.

The sheer volume of leadership books out there might lead you to avoid the bookstore all together. The amount of information in podcasts and videos might confuse more than clarify.

How in the world could a person who is already busy make time for more ideas. You're not even executing the ideas you already have, why spend time searching for more?

Hundreds of years ago, information was confined to the educated, enlightened and powerful. But today, it's online, accessible from the average phone. Books are affordable. Podcasts are free. Conferences are everywhere. While this is an opportunity to some, it's a barrier to others.

Too many choices mean you choose nothing. Too many plans mean you follow none.

So despite the books, conferences, courses, coaches and networks, you put your head down and keep doing the same thing you're doing.

It's not that you don't know there are better plans out there . . . it's that you don't have time to care.

About seven years ago, I came up with a simple plan to cut through the noise. At least for me. You see, I was feeling the same thing you're feeling today when you think about leadership. I was suffering from information overload.

I went to a leadership conference and came home with pages of notes and took little action. I had finished a few more leadership books and posted the notes to my website. Leadership had become a field of study to me.

I was consuming information, but I wasn't doing anything with it. I was learning, but I wasn't applying or growing. And frankly, I grew tired of it all.

So I did something that seemed really simple at the time and something that's morphed into a simple exercise I now share with others.

I created a personal leadership development plan.

"I was consuming information, but I wasn't doing anything with it. I was learning, but I wasn't applying or growing."





A Personal Leadership Development Plan

This conference I attended? I went because I had friends going and they sent an email with a discount code.

Those books I read? I read them because they were bestsellers or recommended by someone.

Every resource was a must-read or a must-attend, because I didn't have focus. I was simply responding to learning opportunities, rather than charting an intentional course to a specific destination. Essentially, I was eating random food from the buffet and I was getting fat on leadership.

So I decided to change that.

I sat down with a sheet of paper and brainstormed the answer to one question: *In what area do I want to become a better leader?*

What was my specific leadership development goal? How did I want to get better? In what way?

See, becoming a better leader is generic and theoretical. You need a more specific goal than that.

Do you want to get better at casting vision, leading meetings, or coaching your team? All of those things take leadership but they are really different skill sets. You're not going to get better at every aspect of leadership at the same time, so don't try.

When you try to work on leadership, every resource in the world with a halfway decent value proposition looks appealing. But when you focus your leadership development goal on a specific outcome, you shrink the playing field down to something that's manageable.

So the first step in leading yourself is creating a plan to get better as a leader. And the first step in creating a plan is setting some specific leadership development goals. From there, you intentionally choose resources that help you accomplish your goals.

If your goal is to become a better communicator, you can intentionally choose the conference or learning event that focuses on the outcome. Ignore the half-off emails and invites from everyone else for the time being...that's sideways. Instead, choose the opportunity that will take you where you want to go.



If your goal is to become a better team builder, you focus on the books that deal with personalities, team meetings, and relationship dynamics. For now, ignore the popular generic events and the best-selling books. Put your focus on your goal and choose resources that get you where you want to go.

Once I got clear on how I wanted to improve as a leader, I was ready to intentionally choose resources that matched.

The conference to attend is not necessarily one that is popular but the one that would be the most helpful.

The books to read are not necessarily those that are best promoted, but those that will teach me what I need to know.

The reason to join a coaching group is not because a friend is in the group, but because the mentor is someone who could help me lead.

These decisions made it easier for me to say no to more generic opportunities, but more importantly, they served as a guide for my goals. It was an intentional plan, not a reactionary one.

I sketched this first draft on a legal pad, but I've since developed this into a much prettier one page PDF.

It's a simple design that helps you make intentional choices.

Start by writing down your leadership development goals for the next year. Then make intentional decisions about where to go, what to read, who to follow and what to put on your schedule. Put it all down on one sheet of paper and let it guide your progress throughout the next year.

Your leadership development plan is unique to you.

If you're not a reader, don't load it up with books. If you learn best in conference environments, lean heavily there. Write a real plan for becoming a better leader.

Your plan isn't about creating a well-rounded diet . . . it's about intentionally choosing who to follow based on your specific goals and needs.

Before you lead another retreat, cast a bigger vision, or clarify expectations for your team, start by creating a leadership development plan that will help you lead the hardest person you will ever lead . . . yourself.

You can download a one-page
leadership development plan template at
[CHURCHFUEL.COM/PERSONALGROWTHPLAN.](https://churchfuel.com/personalgrowthplan)





Resources to Include in Your One-Page Plan



PODCASTS. If you want to improve as a preacher, decide to listen to one podcast a week. Go ahead and write down the name of the podcast and the people you're going to learn from. There are podcasts on every topic imaginable, but decide what you're going to do right now.



BOOKS. Ask friends for recommendations, but decide what books you're going to read. Books are my favorite leadership development tools because the bar is often higher. Reputable authors and books are well-researched and go through a vetting process. Blogs are great, but books are better. Decide how many you're going to read and list their titles. Assign each book to a season of the year or a month on the calendar. Then order them all and place them on your desk.



CONFERENCES. As a leader, you should attend one or two conferences every year. I know they're expensive and travel is required, but they're worth it. Look at the next 12 months and decide what you're going to attend. Put it on your calendar and make travel reservations. Buy your conference tickets and book your hotel room. I promise that something will come up at the church that will make it a "bad time to be gone," but stick to your plan.



CONVERSATIONS. Great leaders understand that there's a wealth of information and information to be gained from relationships. Are there people you want to connect with or learn from as a part of your leadership development? Write their names down and make a plan to get them coffee or buy them lunch. Maybe you can put together an informal meeting of a small group of leaders to talk about a specific leadership topic. These conversations or informal groups can be a tremendous asset to you.



COACHING. "Picking people's brains" is great, but some of the best leaders I know pay money to be a part of a formal coaching program. There's something about paying a coach and joining other people on a similar process. Whether it's online or in person, there are tons of great coaching programs (like Church Fuel) available to you. Don't be a victim of broke thinking and say you can't afford this. Find a way, because a great education is worth it.



4

Parting Shots

Leadership in the church is really discipleship.

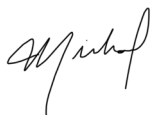
It's helping people discover their gifts and passions and then using them to build up the body of Christ and advance the mission of the church.

Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck say, "The primary purpose for our leadership mandate is to make known the glory of God by leading others to flourish in God's design."

That means when we equip others in the church to do the work of the ministry, we're leading and helping others to lead. It means when we clarify roles and responsibilities, we're helping to clarify people's focus on the Kingdom of God. It means when we get intentional about being a good steward of our own time, we're putting ourselves into a position to be used by God at a deeper and higher level.

Leadership in the church really is like the tide. When the leaders get better, they pull everything up. That's why leadership, even though it may not always feel urgent, really is one of the most important things you can do.

Here's to leadership.



Michael Lukaszewski
Founder and CEO of Church Fuel

