

A RENOVATE RESOURCES E-BOOK



Generating Buy-In as a Church Revitalizer

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Developing vision and a series of action plans for the launching of revitalization in your church begins with the consideration of how you will get you members to buy-in to the vision and take part in the action plans required to bring complete renewal to your church. This is not an easy subject to consider as a church revitalizer, but it is one that you will need to consider early if you are going to invest your first 120 days in revitalization and even more so if you are committing to investing a minimum of one thousand days in the effort. The reason it is not easy is because most Church Revitalizers and Pastors have never been taught how to get buy-in in the first place. The reality is that in creating a strategic story for any revitalization strategy, there must be a positive preferred future in which to travel towards. Usually, most Revitalizers do not know how to generate such buy-in by significant church audiences for continual advancement. I define the concept of generating buy-in as a church revitalizer as an agreement to join in the effort of renewal, even though those who are agreeing to the idea did not initially have anything to do with the process beforehand. Generating buy-in requires that the revitalization leader draws as many congregants together in a single vision of renewal even though most of them have not had any input in the strategy. Certainly, there have been church staff and church lay leaders contributing, but the average rank and file members have had little if any input or suggestions. Developing buy-in for the renewal process requires generating understanding while seeking commitment and requiring action from church members in support of the Church Revitalizer, the Revitalizer's ideas, the Church Renewal Teams Proposal, plan, outcome, and structure. For the revitalization effort buy-in is the indispensable emotional ingredient needed for any cooperative revitalization effort to be fruitful. There is no simple cookie-cutter process for overcoming some church member's natural ambivalence toward, or even active resistance to, major church change.

There is something within many individuals that oppose change. It is as if we have a resistance towards change button that turns on when we are challenged with a degree of discomfort.

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As human beings we naturally resist change, we like things to stay the same because that is where we are most comfortable. Yet in the business world, organizations evolve and new ways of doing things emerge. The same is true of healthy churches. Not so for unhealthy declining ones. Change is upon us before we realize it and the need to be more open to, and embrace change, has never been greater. The church revitalizer who desires to lead their church through revitalization and renewal must learn the art of generating buy-in from church members. Their ability to influence and persuade is often a large part of creating that initial thrust towards renewal. How a revitalizer navigates the negotiation revolution with church members often determines if the church can indeed get back to health and become a renewed church. If you are a top down leader who calls out the commands from on high expecting those in the trenches to snap to it and get in line, you will have a difficult time being used as a church revitalizer. Your ability to raise the level of buy-in is paramount in revitalization. Facing the reality as a church revitalizer that we cannot turn around a church by ourselves but that it requires the buy-in from church members and church leaders is necessary. I need you as a brand-new church revitalizer to buy-in to the idea that you need to lean a series of things within your first one hundred and twenty day in order for you to become a successful revitalizer of your church. You need your congregants to buy-in to your vision for renewal. Let's face it all of us need someone to buy-in to our ideas almost every day of the week. If we are going to succeed in church revitalization and renewal it will require that we seek the buy-in from others in the church and in the church's leadership structure. In fact, your ability to generate such buy-in will be a skill set, that once developed, you will use over and over in turning around dying churches.

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Buy-in is viewed as your ability to gain others understanding, achieve their willingness to make a commitment, and to call from them an action that supports your vision for renewal. Sometimes it is as simple as a hand raised vote and at other times it requires a willingness to join in actual hard work in order to achieve the series of goals that will lead to renewal of your declining or plateaued church. As you influence your members thoughts, feelings and actions you are generating their buy-in. If you can grow as a leader in the area of development of buy-in to your cause you will be well on your way to achieving church revitalization and renewal. This one single skill will be perhaps the greatest tool a church revitalizer can learn. No matter where the Lord calls him in the future once learned God will utilize this gift over and over in renewal of declining churches. Understand this if you will, in today's churches there are often those who do not desire to follow the one the Lord has called as their pastor to lead their church. Compelling others to buy-in and follow your lead will be a necessary factor towards the renewal of the church. Wise church revitalizers work hard at getting their church members to believe in the cause and to believe in you the one leading them towards renewal. Church members need to believe in church revitalization and the fact that the Lord wants to save their church. Also, they need to be growing in their belief of you as the leader who can lead them out of the wilderness and into the promised land. Buy-in is everything. Once you have it renewal seems to fall into place one piece of the puzzle after another. But if you have not invested enough time in achieving it, you will likely fail and chances for success are diminished. Take the time to create healthy buy-in to your vision for revitalization and renewal.

Positioning the Juncture for Buy-in from Church Members

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No matter what your ideas are there will come a time where you must begin positioning the juncture or crossroads where ideas from the pastor leader are acknowledged and considered by the church members. Membership reaction to pastoral ideas for change is many times mere suspension of judgements against anything that moves the church off of status quo. The moment there is tension in the fellowship about the new direction these individuals will jump in to massacre your revitalization effort and shatter it. Usually, those in lower ends of leadership within the church are the ones who grow uncomfortable with the new direction. In portion this is due to the realities that this group will be required to make the most significant series of changes over the upper levels of church leadership. Thinking through the immediate, short-term, mid-term and long-range benefits before proceeding towards renewal will equip you as the leader to embrace this group and help them see the best future for the life of the church. Here are a few of the benefits of generating buy-in for the vision of revitalizing the local church where you serve:

Juncture Positioning Allows You to Share Reality Without Any Judgement

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Speaking the truth and reality as an opportunity for the Lord to do something great is important. Many members in declining churches have false positive views of the health and vitality of the church. Facts in the process of revitalization are a church revitalizer's friend. When you launch the effort of renewal with an straightforward and thorough effort to determine the truth of the churches situation, the right decisions, choices, and conclusions often become self-evident. This single element in church renewal is the extent to which renewal leaders commit from the beginning to be forthright, above board, trustworthy, and willing to share with the congregation completely what, why, where, and how the revitalization effort is going to proceed. I have learned in working with churches in need of revitalization and renewal that fully disclosing everything allows the membership to not only have head knowledge but heart knowledge as you touch their emotions as well. It is a traction maker not breaker. Appealing to feelings often proceeds appealing to our thinking mechanisms. Showing a church membership is compelling. Pie Charts of data only bore the member so paint a beautiful picture and tell an incredible story of what the church will be once renewal is accomplished. Declining churches are made up of members who would like to see the opportunity you present to them. They want to feel the feelings that will be the new norm of a healthy church. Change is then easier to embrace because of showing them how their challenges are going to be transformed into opportunities.

Juncture Positioning Allows You an Opportunity to Break the Renewal Process Down

It is always easier to take small bites over great big ones. When you as the church revitalizer break the renewal process down into smaller manageable portions, it is easier to see the journey. Because you are ultimately investing a minimal of one thousand days this initial segment of one hundred and twenty days is a more manageable piece to begin the effort. By painting the picture in manageable pieces often known as chunking, you are able to lower the threat level for many members who fear any and all portions of change. This allows for stages of buy-in and gives most church members the time to become accustomed to where the church is going in renewal. Chunking allows for bite size steps to be taken and proven successful, before you move on to the next piece of the renewal process.

Juncture Positioning Allows You as the Church Revitalizer to Hear form Others

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Because relationships will either make you or brake you it is vital that you begin to hear what fellow staff members, lay church leaders, and church members are saying and thinking. If you fail to do this one thing, your membership and staff will begin to become resistant. That resistance will then translate over into dislike of you and your ideas for renewal. As you hear from others you are given the opportunity to address, explain, and navigate the issues. Overcoming such resistance requires probing, analyzing and listening. Relationships come first while ideas are secondary. Keep talking with your membership pastor. Keep the flock engaged in the process and do not shut them out.

Juncture Positioning Allows You as the Church Revitalizer to Change the Course

Just because you are called to your church to lead it through the process of revitalization does not mean you are to drive the effort by leading the effort like a Brigadier General. Rank doesn't mean much in a local church if you as the leader lose your followers. This is where high "D" on the disc scale leaders get in trouble in revitalization. Shouting out orders and expecting the privates to jump in line doesn't work in most churches. Churches renew better from the bottom up not the top down form of leadership. Top down leadership behavior often will harm the churches ability to be revitalized. Change comes best when the pastor leader works with the rank and file church member to devise plans for saving one's church. Keeping those who work hard within the church structure involved is critical to the effort. Listening to them and hearing them out will often lead to the proper change direction in setting the course for renewal.

Go Early and Often to Gain Stakeholder Support and Buy-in

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You can be assured that everything around us is changing. Change is persistent and perpetual in renewal. As the revitalization leader you will never change things by fighting your current reality. To change your church and move it towards renewal, begin building a new model that makes the existing model obsolete. Even the tiniest piece of change can have a rippling effect for a church in decline. Stake holders are your committed church members which comprise the levels of leadership structure within your church. It could be a series of various groups that are part of the church stakeholder organization. It could be a quantity of individuals which make up the matriarchs and patriarchs. It could be the parents of the younger children or parents of the youth. A church choir is often a stakeholder group. Anytime you are beginning to launch out a renewal effort it will require that you as the church revitalizer work to gain the buy-in of key groups of people in your church. This buy-in is the cement that builds the foundations and the glue that connects the membership to the effort. Let's look at how you go about discovering who these stakeholders are:

Recognize Who are the Stakeholders Within Your Church

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Early in my ministry I was on staff as the Youth Minister of a church in south Florida. We had this very elaborate worship service one Sunday where we dedicated a set of church chimes which would ring out every day reminding the community of not only the time but it would ring out particular church hymns as well. I was surprised that a church service would be set aside to dedicate a piece of equipment that was no higher than four feet and no higher than three-foot square. It sat in a closet and piped out recorded chimes on the hour, quarter hour, and half hour. Every evening at seven it would play a hymn through the chimes for all of the community to hear. I asked later that week of my senior pastor why we took the whole service to do that and he replied that when your number one stakeholder at church wants to donate church chimes to the church you hold a dedication service. That was my early introduction in ministry to stakeholders within a church. I began to realize that every church has stakeholders. It was easy in that church to see who the stakeholders were but it might be harder for you even in a declining church. It would be wise for you to consider who they are and the influence they have over the future direction of the church as well as the rank and file membership. I remember a youth pastor getting fired in Augusta because he reached all kinds of youth who needed Christ Jesus. The stakeholders only desired to have youth who were family members of church members. Understanding who these members are is a good way to assess the impact they will have on the revitalization effort. Stakeholder evaluation also has the objective of developing collaboration between the stakeholder and the church revitalization team, assuring successful outcomes for the effort.

Distinguish Your Stakeholder Needs in Renewal

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Often, I hear a stakeholder say in a well-meaning way that they want to see the church revitalized but that they hope the pastor does not mess with their 8:30 senior service. I understand that. They are letting you know that they will be open to an additional service focused on renewal of the church, but wish that the early service of which they are part of remains about the same. When you analyze the needs of your stakeholders, it will give you a picture of whether or not the church can be revitalized. Keeping one service the same while adding or changing another is not too much to ask for their full support. Stakeholders have needs and are willing to share them with the pastor. As you meet with your stakeholders to discuss their needs it gives you opportunity to let them know you value them as a church member and as one who loves their church. By understanding to what degree, you can expect buy-in from your stakeholders you are better able to navigate the issues which could sink the effort. It further allows you to consider any rising pockets of resistance towards the revitalization of the church. Tailoring your church communication towards each stakeholder cluster safeguards that you are communicating successfully how the proposed changes will affect each stakeholder and what the effort will bring to the declining church.

Stakeholders are Best Engaged Through the Three H's

What are the three H's in engaging your churches stakeholders? They are engaging their head, their heart, and their hands. As you engage these members through the utilization of these stages you are better able to keep most of them connected to the church. when you share with them why the need for revitalization through the facts, you are engaging the head and their knowledge. They can see the benefits of a church full again. As you engage the longtime member through their hearts, you enable them to come to see and believe in their heart that the change is the correct thing for the church and now is the right time. They will also in their heart see that there are healthy benefits for the church they love as well. When you engage their hands to become part of the effort you are allowing them to become part of the army which will bring renewal to fruition.

Engage Your Churches Leadership and Governance Groups

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In churches there are groups such as elder, staff, and deacons which also need to be engaged. These are busy individuals already doing the work of the local church so time in going to be a precious commodity for them. They need to be engaged but not required to add even more to their busy schedules. Find ways they can be engaged but not adding additional requirements above visual and vocal support.

What is not measured in churches gets pushed down further and further until it is trampled on. Keep everyone involved and ask for their opinion often. Stakeholders will appreciate you taking the time to ask them even if they have no suggestions at the moment for you to consider. Keeping them in the buy-in group is important to the success of the revitalization effort.

A Renovate Resources E-Book

The Renovate Group is glad to provide you with companion E-Books to go along with the *Revitalization Today Podcast* with **Drs. Tom Cheyney and Gary Moritz**, two bald guys with a big heart to help your church create, cultivate, and collaborate on current renewal and revitalization issues. We are glad you have tuned in to the podcast and want to give you a resource which allows you to actually utilize it over merely listening to the podcast. Thanks for joining us today as we look at the most significant shift in 200 years within the church world. Please be sure to visit **RenovateResources.com**. for further resources on church revitalization, leadership development, and church renewal as well as previous editions of the Revitalization Today Podcast. Until He returns, Stay Refreshed, Stay Renewed, and Stay Revitalized.

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