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**a) v.2- 3**

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### Human response to the Divine presence

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**Gene Getz ! The Measure of Man/  
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**b) REMEMBER**

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| (5) a O  | b 1D | c 2D | (22) a O    | b 1P | c 2P |
| (6) a O  | b 1G | c 2G | (23) a O    | b 1D | c 2D |
| (7) a O  | b 1P | c 2P | (24) a O    | b 1G | c 2G |
| (8) a O  | b O  |      | (25) a O    | b 1P | c 2P |
| (9) a O  | b 1D | c 2D | (26) a, b&c |      |      |
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| (11) a O | b 1G | c 1G |             |      | 1D   |
| (12) a O | b 1P | c 2P |             |      | 6D   |
| (13) a O | b 1D | c 2D | (27) a O    | b 1G | c 2G |
| (14) a O | b 1G | c 2G | (28) a O    | b 1P | c 2P |
| (15) a O | b 1P | c 2P | (29) a O    | b 1G | c 2G |
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**P**      0- 4P =  
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**3)**

**R**

**R Realize**

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**R Remember**

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**R Refuse**

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**R Respond**

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**"kobunban"**

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**"krabbalos"**

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## **Sharing Questions & Retational Games in small Groups**

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**to be a servant**

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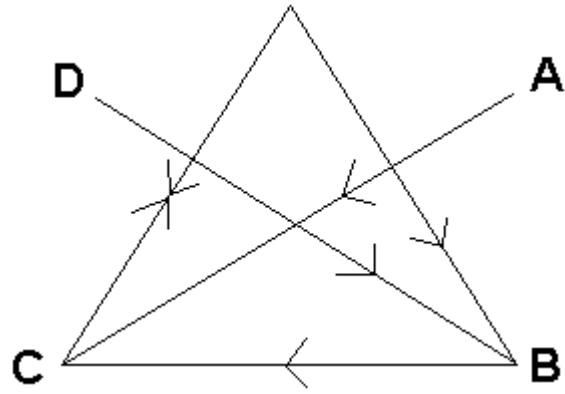
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## **SHARING QUESTIONS AND RELATIONAL GAMES IN CHRISTIAN SMALL GROUPS**

**A steady diet of superficial conversations strangles the soul with chit-chat. Human beings are created to live in relationships with God and with fellow humans. We long to know and be known at deep personal levels even as we fear involvement lest we be hurt. Simply sitting with a small group of people does not guarantee building personal relationships at a level where we can sense our unity and affirm the worth and gifts of each other. Usually groups need some kind of structure which facilitates personal sharing.**

**Two activities which can be used to enable depth conversations are " sharing questions" and " relational games" . Sharing questions are simple one or two sentence questions, usually open ended, which give people permission to talk about themselves. There is no " right" or " wrong" answer. Rather, people are encouraged to talk about their past experiences, their pilgrimage of faith, their day-to-day situations, likes and dislikes, sorrows and joys. The stress is not on sharing ideas and concepts but on sharing ourselves. This self-disclosure results in being known and makes possible receiving affirmation and love. The risk in sharing is that if we let people know us, they may not like us. Refusing to risk, however, means refusing to receive the love which we all need so desperately. Sharing questions should encourage some level of risk while not forcing a person to share beyond their own willingness to do so.**

**Relational games are more structured experiences often with several questions and one or more activities which focus group members on a particular topic or experience for discussion. Because of the more elaborate nature of " games" , they can become gimmicks of " instant community" which become tiresome in a long-term group. Used properly, however, they can speed up the process of building relationships, and help participants become deeply involved with each other in a relatively short period of time.**

### **Some Guidelines**

- 1. Match the threat level of the question or game to the experience of the group members and their willingness to risk. Work up to the more intimate, more frightening kind of questions. Begin safe but do not waste valuable time on trivia.**
- 2. No manipulation. While encouraging everyone to participate, allow them to reshape the question if it makes them more comfortable or to pass if they want to.**
- 3. No advice giving. Practice good listening skills of clarification and paraphrasing but do not**

**judge each other or tell each other what to do. By and large, do not encourage long discussions of problems and possible solutions. Rather encourage people to respond to the question asked, and then move the discussion along to the next person. Usually, if a person really needs to thoroughly air a personal problem, allow them to share as they need to; if appropriate, have the group pray right then for the difficulty, and then encourage conversation outside the group time.**

- 4 Beware of vague, general abstractions. Stay specific, personal, and here-and-now as much as possible.**
- 5 Encourage a win-win mentality. Instead of a few building themselves up at the expense of others, work toward an equalized involvement on the part of all members so each can share, can affirm, be affirmed, be encouraged, and be built up.**

## HOW TO DEVELOP SHARING QUESTIONS

Sharing questions are an important tool to enable the building of personal relationships and care in the small group or committee. While many questions have already been developed and are available through the syllabus, the best questions are often those developed with a specific group in mind at a particular point in the group's life together. Some suggestions for developing questions are:

1. **Where is the group in its life cycle? Does the group need sharing questions focused on history-giving, sharing the present, looking to the future, enabling affirmation or encouraging personal accountability?**

Decide the focus of the question.

- 2 **After deciding on the focus of the question, write a question which asks for information or factual material in the area of focus**

e.g. **Area of focus** History-giving

**Where did you live when you were twelve?**

Then add to the information request, a request for personal self-disclosure through emotional response.

e.g. **Where did you live when you were twelve and what did you like most about it?**

**Summary:** Link a request for sharing facts about the self with the emotional response to that fact.

### **Examples**

**History:** **When is the first time you remember winning at something important to you and how did you feel about that?**

**Present:** **What is a good thing happening in your life right now and what makes it good?**

**Future:** **What is one change you would like to make in your life in the next two years and why?**

**Affirmation:** **What is one thing you appreciate about one other member of this group and why?**

**Task      What is one responsibility you have to fulfill this next week and how do you feel about that?**

**3 Ask questions which call for information not readily available to other group members unless voluntarily self disclosed**

**e.g. What is a typical Tuesday like for you? Describe your day briefly beginning with when you get up and when you go to bed. What do you like most and like least in your day?**

**4 Ask questions which can be answered briefly (in three minutes or so) if the group is new or wants to spend a limited amount of time on sharing**

**Notice: 3 minutes per person with 10 people will take at least 30 minutes.**

**Not: Share the roughest experience of your whole life. (This will take at least 5-10 minutes per person, usually more.)**

**But: Share one area of struggle you are working on this week.**

**5 Characteristics of good questions:**

**a. They are understandable without explanation. They are clear on their surface with no vocabulary which must be defined before people can answer. Simple is best.**

**b. They do not require people to confess their sins or share only negative things about themselves.**

**Not: What is your worst fault?**

**c. They can be answered by every member of the group.**

**Not: When did you graduate from college and what was your major?**

**d. They are worth the time of the group to listen to each other's answers.**

**Not: What is your most despised vegetable and why?**

**e. They help the group members to know each other better and thus learn to understand and love each other.**

**f. The question does not call for yes/no responses but for a fuller statement. Also: The question should not ask for superlatives, the best or the worst, but rather, one good or one bad experience.**

**g. The question allows for enough diversity in response so that each member is not saying the same thing.**

**Not: Who is your favorite preacher and why?**



**But Who is one important person in your life and why?**

**h. The question asks for personal sharing of the self not for opinions on issues**

**Not: What do you think about abortion?**

## **6 Integration**

**Whenever possible, a good sharing question should arise out of the Bible study or the task of the group rather than be a "tacked on" extra**

**eg. In a study on prayer, ask**

**When has prayer been a meaningful experience for you or**

**When has it been a struggle?**

**In a task group on evangelism, ask**

**What challenges you or threatens you when you think of sharing your faith?**

## **7. Ground Rules**

**a. Allow people to "pass" if they are not ready to respond. Do check back with them at the end of the sharing time to see if they wish to share now. Don't force them to share.**

**b. Mix questions which call for "negative" and "positive" sharing. Don't always ask people to share problems or always to share victories. Mix them up.**

**c. Don't ask followup questions after people share unless you intend for only a few to speak. Affirm nonverbally or briefly what has been shared and move to the next person.**

**d. Usually you ask someone to begin sharing and then go in a circle from there. Begin yourself, and be brief, only if no one else could go first comfortably.**

**e. Watch the time. If the first one or two speak at length, intervene by saying "Let's share briefly so all may have a chance to speak"**

**See the Syllabus for more examples of questions**

## EXAMPLES OF SHARING QUESTIONS

- **What is the best vacation you ever took and why?**
- **What is your favorite place in the house and why?**
- **When you have some free time to yourself, what do you like to do?**
- **If you could receive one unexpected present, what would you like it to be?**
- **When, if ever, did God become more than a word to you?**
- **If you could pick one character in fiction, TV, or the comics to identify with, who would that be and why? If you could pick one person in the Bible or church history that you would like to be like, who would that be and why?**
- **What is one thing you worried about or were concerned about this week?  
One thing that gave you joy?**
- **Where did you live and what were you doing when you were in the 6th grade?**
- **What is one area where you would like to grow in your Christian faith?  
What kind of help do you need to do it?**
- **What is one personal relationship you would like to work on? Why? How?**
- **If you could wave a magic wand that would make your marriage (family, job, church) perfect, how would it be different from how it is now? What one step could you take to move toward that now?**
- **What is one job you enjoy doing around your home?**
- **What is one place in the United States that you would really like to visit?**
- **When was the first time you heard about Jesus and what did you think about Him?**
- **What is the one thing, or person, that gives you most satisfaction?**
- **What did you like to do the most when you were a child.**
- **Spot one object/thing in this room and describe a feeling, memory, or thought that it evokes in you.**

## **EXAMPLES OF SHARING QUESTIONS**

### **PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE**

- **What is an early memory of your childhood play? Where were you and what was it like?**
- **What is your favorite Sunday afternoon pastime and why?**
- **What improvement would you like to see in your present vocation by this time next year?**
- **What hobby was most enjoyable in your teens?**
- **After a hard day at school/work, how do you relax with your friends?**
- **If you were to take a vacation with a friend, where would you go and what would you do?**
- **The most frightening experience I ever had was... ..**
- **If you could do any job you wanted to, what would you be doing in 5 years?**
- **What was your favorite animal that you had in your childhood? What made it special?**
- **Who is the most influential person (besides Christ) in your life? How?**
- **What one quality in your Christian life do you want to be good at in 5 years?**
- **What is one thing which has helped your prayer life and one thing which has hindered your prayer life?**
- **When you are fifty, what do you hope to be doing?**
- **Was there a situation in the recent past in which you were instrumental in the growth of another person? If so, in what way were you instrumental?**
- **Observing your present ministry, what one area do you feel needs the greatest amount of attention?**
- **If you had the ability to do anything you desired in terms of ministry, no matter how far fetched it might seem, what would that area of ministry be?**
- **In Jr. High, where did you live and what is one thing that you remember about that time?**
- **If you knew that you could not fail, what are two things that you would like to do or accomplish in the next 10 years?**
- **What 3 things do you like about your father? Dislike?**
- **What one characteristic that your father has do you desire in your own life?  
Do you reject for yourself?**

## **Sample Sharing Questions continued**

- **Where did you go to school as a child and what do you remember?**
- **What three adjectives could best describe your past week? What triggered good feelings? Bad?**
- **If you could be doing anything you want this time next year, what would it be?**
- **If you could go back in time and change any particular year in life, which would it be and what would you do differently?**
- **What are the two or three most valuable possessions you have? Why are they valuable to you?**
- **What is one thing you are looking forward to that you know will happen in the near future?**
- **When you were in high school, what activity did you most enjoy doing with your folks?**
- **What do you do to release tension at the end of a day or week?**
- **Describe your ideal house and how you would furnish it.**
- **If you had to describe one frustration you've had with this group, what would it be?**
- **When this group comes to an end, what three positive feelings do you hope to have experienced?**
- **What was your favorite TV program when you were 12 years old and why?**
- **Name something you did this last week where your Christian faith did/did not make a difference and explain why.**
- **What one aspect of your marriage do you see a need for a change in? What are your current plans to bring about this change?**
- **What kind of dreams for your future did you have when you were 12 years old?**
- **If you went home and found a check written to you in your mailbox for \$1,000,000, how would you use the money?**
- **When you were an adolescent, what did you want to grow up to be? How does that influence you now?**
- **What is one thing you did this week with another person that you wish you had the chance to do over again?**
- **If you could have any message engraved on your tombstone when you die, what would it be?**

### **Sample Sharing Questions continued**

- **What was your special area of study while in college? Why did you select this area? Why was it special to you?**
- **What prompted you to think about God today?**
- **How did you feel whenever you were introduced to someone new to you when you were a child? How do you experience that now?**
- **What experience today gave you a happy moment? Why?**
- **If you could make up any title in the world to hang outside your door, what would it be? Why?**
- **What did you or your family do on Sunday afternoons when you were between the ages of 6 and 12? How did you feel about doing it?**

## **SAMPLE RELATIONAL GAMES**

**The two best sources of relational games are the writings of Lynan Odeman (*Serendipity, Celebration, et al.*) and the various volumes in *A Handbook of Structured Experiences for Human Relations Training* by Wm Pfeiffer and John E. Jones. The latter needs to be adapted for Christian groups.**

**EXAMPLE: "What Makes Me Tick" taken from *Rap* by Lynan Odeman, p. 27f. See the complete instructions in the book. (The session has two parts: 1. preliminary inventory worked on individually, and 2. small group interaction in groups of four.)**

### **1. Preliminary Inventory: (10 minutes)**

**Taking 3 age periods of your life: 7-12 yrs, 13-17 yrs, 18 & over yrs, write down 3 achievements for each period. "What gave me a sense of personal accomplishment during this period?" Next to each write in a short phrase why each accomplishment was important to you.**

### **2. Small-Group Interaction: (30 minutes)**

**In groups of 4, each one shares what he wrote in the first category (age 7-12) and why. Then repeat for 2nd and 3rd categories. If time, go around again with each one sharing the thing he considers the most rewarding experience or the greatest success in his life and why.**

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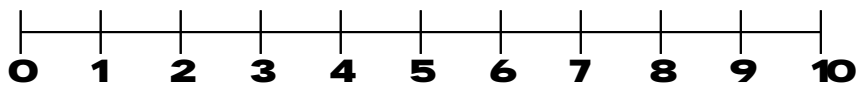
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A) John Maxwell Leadership is influence nothing more,  
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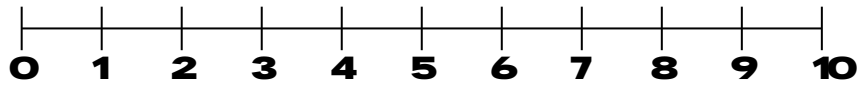
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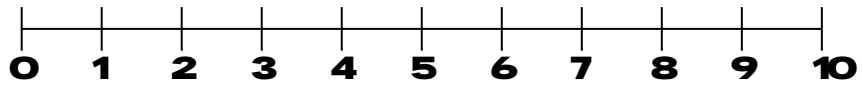


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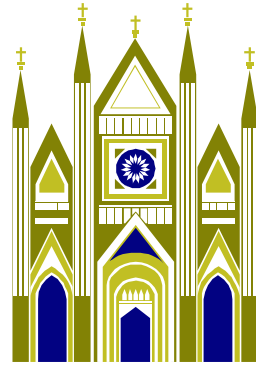
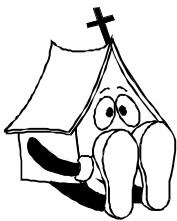
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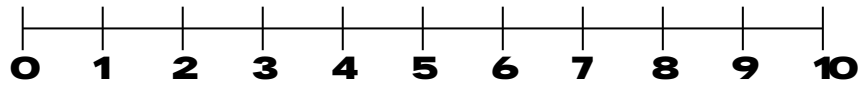
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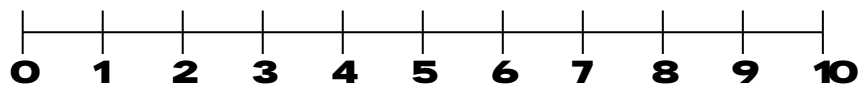
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**positional leaders**

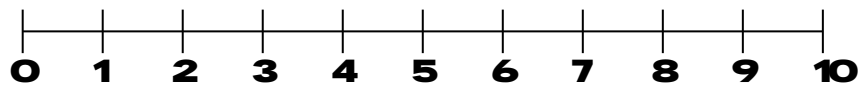
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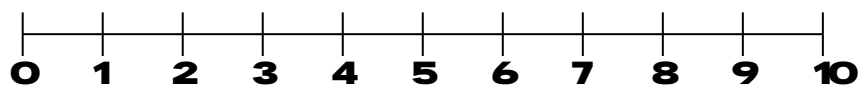
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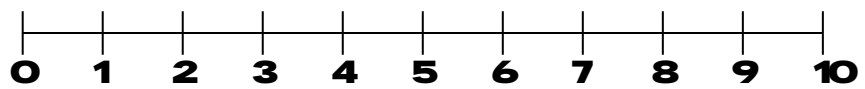
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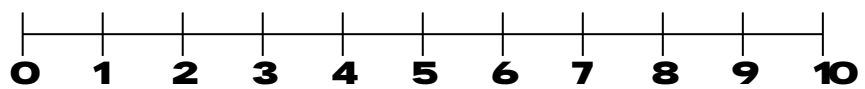
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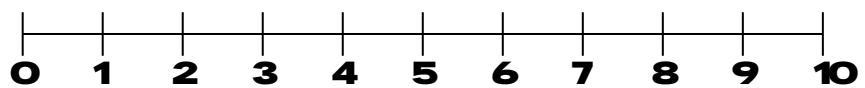
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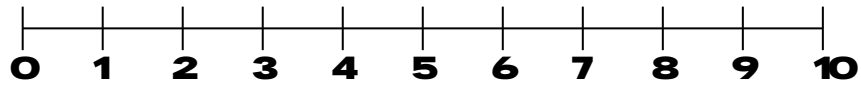
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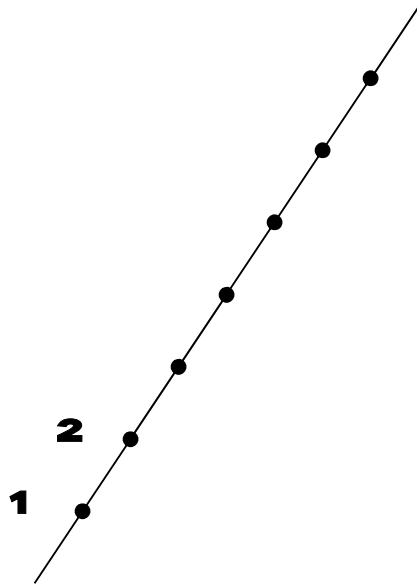
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chart the course

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**Leadership is influence, nothing less, nothing more.**

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**Dr. Gil Steigitz**

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- **Initiative**
- **Influence**
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- **Irresistibility**
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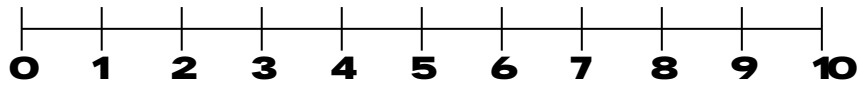
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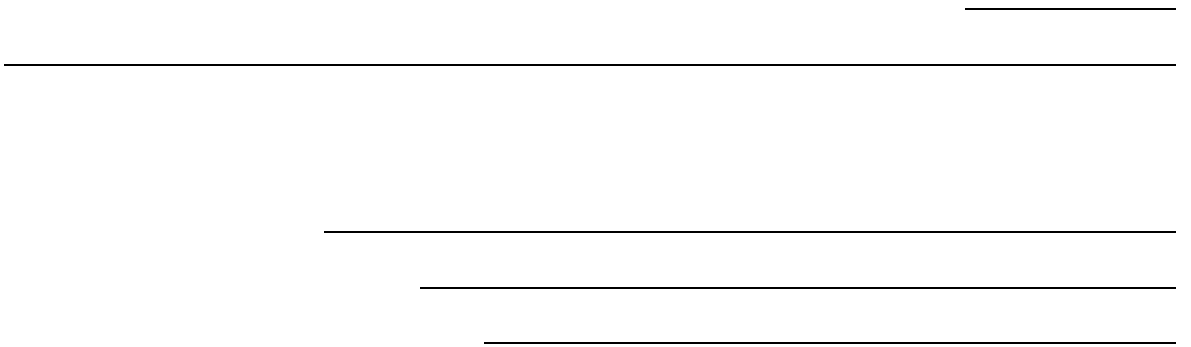
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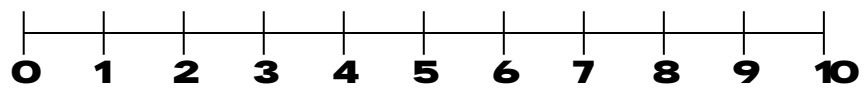
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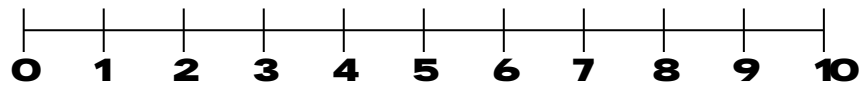
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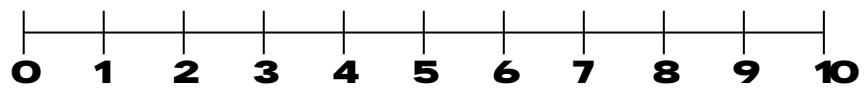
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**John Maxwell Laws of Leadership P.56 57**

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chart the course

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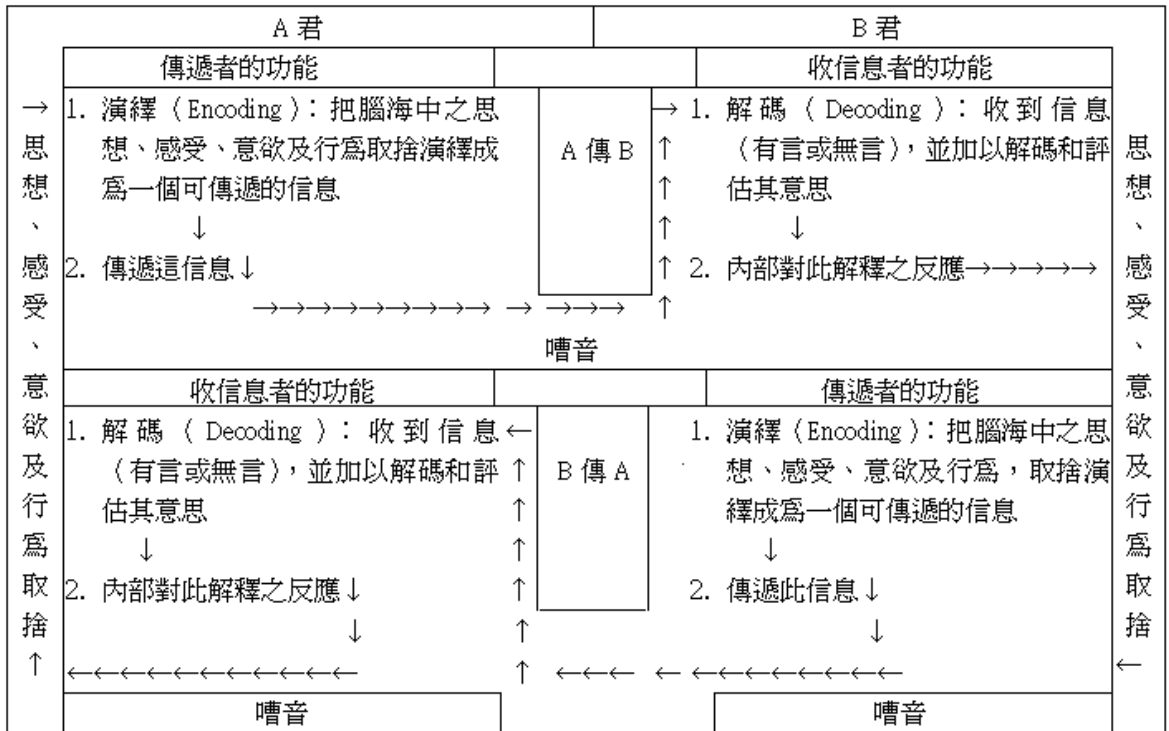
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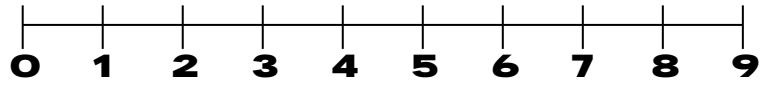


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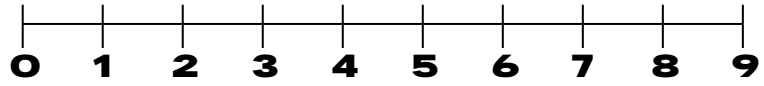
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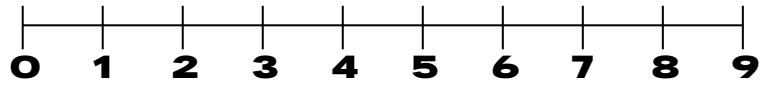
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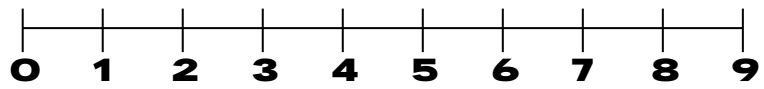
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## LIFO: Improving Communications & Personal Strengths

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### **Ignore Your Weaknesses**

The usual pattern for planning in churches goes something like this

- i) Size up the ministry.**
- ii) Identify any major weaknesses.**
- iii) Develop and implement a plan for removing those weaknesses.**

While this might sound like a great approach, in reality it seldom does much good. In many cases, it actually undercuts the strengths that already exist. It violates one of the most important paradoxes of church leadership: Strong churches ignore their weaknesses.

Not that these churches are unaware of problems or blinded to flaws. On the contrary, they are usually aware of problems and quick to act. But at the same time, they have learned to ignore weaknesses in favor of focusing on strengths. Instead of worrying about all the things the church or pastor does poorly, they identify and build upon those things the church or pastor does well. They know it is easier and more effective to build upon strength than to build around weakness.

When we spend time worrying about weaknesses, there is seldom enough time or energy left to identify and develop strengths. Instead of creative and assertive, we end up defensive. The result is most often a mediocre program designed more to minimize weaknesses than to capitalize on opportunities.

I think of one church that, frozen out by the high cost of New England real estate, was forced to meet in inadequate facilities for ten years. Trying to overcome this weakness, the pastor and board members spent great amounts of time, money, and emotional energy attempting to come up with a better facility. Unfortunately, they couldn't find one. And in the meantime, they failed to develop and build upon the two greatest strengths they had.

First, they were blessed with a host of young, open-minded families, willing and often eager to try new things (as evidenced by their attendance at a church that met in a shopping center). Many new and innovative programs that would take years to launch in a more traditional setting would have been quickly accepted by these folks.

But because the leaders channeled most of their creative energy into land-search committees and fund raising, they didn't have the energy or

creativity to develop new and innovative ministries. Instead, they settled for a traditional style of ministry. Ironically, it was a style that needed excellent facilities in order to succeed.

Second, the absence of a large mortgage left them in excellent financial shape. Most years, they ended up well in the black. They had the money to hire top-quality staff capable of designing and leading an outstanding program.

Yet most of this money was stashed in a building fund. Instead of a top-notch staff, they settled for an excellent senior pastor and a group of poorly paid, part-time assistants. The result? Inadequate staffing to go along with their inadequate facilities.

It's no wonder that after a fast start this church began to slow down, and then started moving backward. Its leaders had fallen into the trap of problem-centered planning, a common occurrence for those who focus on their weaknesses.

Instead of being problem-centered, strong churches tend to be potential-centered. They don't ask, "What are we doing wrong?" They ask, "What are we now have, and what has kept them coming back? How can we do these things better? How can we strengthen our strengths?"

One church in our area has a strong ministry to senior adults. Any visitor is sure to be struck by the preponderance of gray and balding heads—and the lack of empty seats. At the same time, it's hard not to notice the one glaring weakness: the absence of young families.

Problem-centered planning would suggest that the leaders of this church search for ways to bring in young families. A younger pastor, a few choruses instead of hymns, and three or four youthful board members might be good places to start.

But in reality, trying to solve the young-families weakness would be a big mistake. Such changes would alienate, to some degree, many of the older saints they have. And if the changes were carried out gently enough so as not to ruffle any feathers they probably wouldn't draw the young families they were designed to attract. In place of a dynamic ministry to seniors (tailored to their tastes, interests, and needs), the church would likely be left with a diluted ministry satisfying neither the older saints nor the younger ones.

Potential-centered planning, on the other hand, would suggest hiring another older pastor, repairing the organ, increasing daytime ministries, and developing a

**stronger visitation and support system. Instead of worrying about weaknesses, the church would capitalize on its greatest strength: an effective ministry to senior adults.**

**When it came time for our church to add our first full-time associate, most people assumed we would have him concentrate on our weakest area of ministry: a fledgling youth ministry that averaged only five kids per week. Instead, we called him with the express stipulation that he spend no time with our struggling youth program. Rather, we asked Mike to focus on our two greatest strengths: ministry to adults and young children. As he focused on these, our ministry continued to grow in both health and numbers. Soon we had the people and financial resources to support a top-quality youth program. Then we brought on a staff person to develop one.**

**Every church has its areas of weakness, but the churches that accomplish the most have learned not to worry about them. They've accepted the fact that great strengths come with correspondingly great weaknesses. They know that no one church can do the work of the entire kingdom; churches, like individuals, have been gifted and called to do some things uncommonly well and others not at all. They've grasped the first and perhaps most important paradox of successful leaders: Ignore your weaknesses.**

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### **Let Squeaky Wheels Squeak**

**Weaknesses are not only thing to be ignored. There are also certain people who are best treated with benign neglect. I call these folks "squeaky wheels."**



They are found within every church, sometimes on the fringe, other times in the leadership. Unlike other members with legitimate complaints and criticisms, genuine squeaky wheels (1) are never quite happy with the direction of ministry and (2) let everybody know it.

The natural response is to oil these squeaky wheels. We alter our plans or give them extra attention in the hope of silencing their criticism. Unfortunately, it seldom works. Most squeaky wheels keep right on squeaking for a simple reason: they don't squeak for a lack of oil; they squeak because it's their nature to squeak. Wise church leaders know an important paradox: Church harmony is inversely related to the amount of time spent oiling squeaky wheels.

This is a lesson the church board and I were slow to grasp. In our zeal for maintaining peace and unity within the body, we often allowed a small group of chronic complainers to have an inordinate impact upon our decisions and ministry. In effect, we gave them veto power over anything we suggested, or might suggest.

A man I'll call Fred was one such squeaky wheel. Whether it was our song selection, a program change, my preaching content, or a rumor of someone else's dissatisfaction, something was always wrong. If we didn't hear about it directly, we heard about it secondhand. For nearly three years, we tried everything we could think of to keep him happy.

We assumed it was possible to keep everyone happy. We failed to realize that some people (studies show as high as 7 to 10 percent) will be unhappy no matter what. Finally, in the middle of a discussion of how to handle Fred's latest grievance, Bob, a board member, asked why I didn't just take him up on it next time he threatened to resign. To my surprise, the rest of the board chimed in with their agreement.

So I did. And sure enough, Fred and his wife soon left the church. But the musical crisis we dreaded never materialized. We found someone else of equal talent within a week. As for his influence, that was overblown. No one else left the church, and only four or five people even mentioned his departure. As for disunity, those days of trying to walk on eggshells were the least unified days we've known.

The fact is, oiling squeaky wheels can be hazardous to the health of a church. Leaders who place too much emphasis on keeping everyone happy risk abdicating leadership. Instead of initiating, we end up reacting. "What does God want us to do?" is replaced with, "What do they want us to do?" Without

realizing it, we grant a small core of chronic complainers an invisible but powerful position on our leadership team

Giving too much attention to a few squeaky wheels also sends an unspoken message to the congregation: The best way to have an influence is to complain, and the louder and more often you complain, the better. No wonder, then, that leaders who try to oil every squeaky wheel have the most wheels to oil.

Another problem with giving too much attention to squeaky wheels is that it can cause us to neglect those who are happily carrying on the ministry of the church. A common rule of thumb, The 80/20 Rule, states that 80 percent of a leader's time will be spent dealing with 20 percent of the people. If so, it behooves church leaders to ask, "Which 20 percent of the people are getting 80 percent of our time and attention? Is it the complainers or the producers?"

In the past, the board and I would have had to answer, "The complainers." But now that we've learned the importance of letting squeaky wheels squeak, we no longer face every decision with nagging questions about how "they" will react. And I no longer lie awake at night figuring ways to keep everybody happy. Instead, we've learned to relax and let our squeaky wheels go right on squeaking.

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### **Make Fuzzy Plans**

The third paradox applies to our plans. The common assumption is that the best-run churches have the clearest and most detailed blueprint for the future.

But more often the best-run churches make "fuzzy plans." Not that they neglect planning, but they avoid making plans that are too rigid or detailed. They make plans that give general direction without committing anyone to an irrevocable course of action.

There is a place for detailed strategies and precise plans, but as a rule the best plans are flexible and easily changed. This is particularly true in two areas—finances and operational policy. Ironically, both are often the recipient of our most detailed and inflexible planning.

Take finances. Many churches opt for a highly detailed and restrictive

**annual budget. The planning process is drawn out and intense. Then once the budget is adopted, it can't be changed until the next year.**

**While the motivation for such a process (a desire to avoid fiscal irresponsibility) is excellent, the cure can be worse than the disease. The way most churches devise a budget, the process begins months before it goes into effect. That means the final months of a budget year are planned up to fifteen months ahead of time, despite the fact there is no way to accurately forecast income and expenditures that far in advance. Then, because the figures are considered inflexible, no matter what needs or opportunities come up, the answer is, "Sorry, it's not in the budget, wait until next year."**

**In contrast, we've opted for fuzzy budget planning. Though our budget is clear and detailed, it is also flexible enough to allow for midstream changes. We don't view it as a rigid ceiling on our expenditures; we look at it as an educated (and somewhat hazy) guess of our income and expenses in the coming year. It's a guide, not a straitjacket.**

**That way, if something breaks, we can fix it. When badly needed office equipment becomes available at a good price, we can buy it. The only requirements are that (1) we have the money (we never spend more than we have), and (2) our elder board approves the expenditure. The result: a ministry freed to move ahead rather than stalled until next year.**

**Those who might have resisted a fuzzy budget have had their objections preempted by two steps we've taken. First, we have committed ourselves to never spend more than we have. That way, our flexibility can't bankrupt the church. Second, we tell everyone that the budget is only a planning tool. As long as we make that clear, no one objects when unforeseen changes cause us to overspend some area of the budget.**

**A second area where fuzziness can be helpful is in the realm of church policy. Most church constitutions and policy statements are too detailed and restrictive. They remind me of a complaint an old Navy man made: "Every time a sailor drowns, a new regulation is passed!"**

**Our motives are usually noble. We want to make sure the church stays true to its original purpose. So to protect future members from inept or evil leaders, we lay down regulations. But too often they tie the hands of future leaders, stripping them of the flexibility they need to cope with changing circumstances.**

**For instance, one key to the health of our church has been a strong home**

**fellowship ministry. These weekly home Bible studies are attended by over 70 percent of our adults. Yet we never could have started them if our constitution had institutionalized the traditional midweek meeting at the church. Instead of having the freedom to develop an alternative format for study and prayer, we would have been forced to keep an old one alive, even though it no longer met the needs of our people.**

**Rigid plans, guidelines, and regulations work fine in a stable environment. But if there is anything we know about the future, it's that it won't be like today. It will have new problems, needs, and opportunities, and new leaders as well. Those leaders will need the freedom to lead. So why limit their options? Why hinder the Spirit's ability to replace our favorite wineskins with new ones we've never thought of?**

**Planning is vital, but by purposely keeping plans fuzzy, we can give future leaders a track to run on without forcing them to respond in ways that no longer fit a changing situation.**

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**A** friend told me recently about a new church his denomination tried to start in a small mid-western town. The church got off to a great start. Then one Sunday, early in the second year, people arrived to find their old, hard-worn-down pews replaced by padded stacking chairs, a surprise gift from an anonymous donor.

While everyone filed into the building, the pastor stood by the door beaming. He knew the congregation would be thrilled with the change, and he wanted to watch people's expressions as they came in.

Unfortunately, they weren't thrilled. They were surprised, startled, and upset. Within a few weeks, half of the congregation had left to form another church—one where they could worship God as he commanded, in pews rather than chairs.

His story reminded me of an old farmer's advice. "Go slow," he said. "Churches are a lot like horses. They don't like to be startled or surprised. It causes deviant behavior."

He was right. The fiercest battles in our churches are seldom fought over theology. More often, they are fought over change, sometimes even the slightest change.

I remember well a phone call I received, no long after my arrival at North Coast, from a key lay leader. He said his family was leaving the church, upset over all the changes I was making.

When I asked for specifics, I found I had committed two unpardonable sins. I

had failed to schedule a third annual "All-Church New Year's Eve Party," and I had stopped using a closing hymn in our services. I hadn't thought of either change as significant. They both happened more by accident than design. But for some reason, they startled and surprised my caller. His "deviant behavior" was just what the old farmer had predicted.

There was a time when such petty and negative responses to change left me feeling angry and cynical. I wondered what it was about Christians that caused us to react so antagonistically to change. But after studying organizational culture, I came to realize that Christians aren't the only ones who respond negatively to change. It is a phenomenon found among all groups; it's more of a sociological problem than a spiritual problem.

While that dashed my dreams of change without conflict, it didn't mean all was lost. There were still plenty of ways to limit the conflict and resistance that change can bring. In particular, I've found that following a four-step process when introducing change significantly reduces the opposition and instances of deviant behavior. I use this process whenever I propose a change to the board, and our board uses it whenever we bring a new idea to the congregation. Here are the steps.

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### **Step 1: Test the Waters**

The first thing I do with a new idea is try to find out how people will react should the change actually take place.

Our government leaders are masters at this. Long before making a major proposal, they leak a rough sketch of the idea. Then they stand back and analyze the evening news reports and the response of their constituents. Was the idea vehemently rejected? Widely praised? Which points did opponents attack? Which criticisms were legitimate, and which were obviously partisan? And most important, what changes are needed before making the proposal official?

I follow the same course, I start by asking a cross section of our people—board members, unofficial power brokers, and the average man or woman in the pew—what they think of a possible change. For instance, I might ask their opinion of moving across town, adding a new staff member, or redesigning the church logo. Whether the change is major or insignificant, I try to get a reading on their reaction.

I've found it's best to ask in small, informal social settings. Larger groups tend to inhibit candor, and a formal setting or full-blown presentation causes most people to assume I'm masking for their approval rather than their opinion. At this stage, I'm not looking for approval. I'm not trying to gather a coalition or a support base. All I want is a reading on their initial reaction to the basic idea.

Testing the waters provides me with invaluable information. First, it lets me know if my dissatisfaction with the status quo is shared by others. If not, it's time to slow down and help other people to see the need. Either that or face deviant behavior from those who don't yet agree the changes are needed.

Second, testing the waters tells me what changes not to make. For instance, when our church was founded, it was named for the city we met in. When we moved to a nearby city, everyone agreed the name had to be changed. A number of us also wanted to drop the denominational tag, replacing it with a postscript stating our affiliation. We felt the tag was more of a hindrance than an asset, since most people on the West Coast have no idea what *Evangelical Free Church* represents. Despite the fact that Chuck Swindoll's ministry is just one hundred miles up the road, to this day I'masked if we are a cult, a new religion, Pentecostals, fundamentalists, or we simply don't take offerings!

Most people seemed to like the idea of dropping the denominational label. But while testing the waters I discovered some strong opposition by a couple of key lay leaders, enough to create a major conflict. We dropped the idea. A test of the waters had shown us the price we would have to pay for making the change. It was a price we were unwilling to pay.

Third, testing the waters tells me which aspects of a proposed change will receive the strongest resistance and who the staunchest resisters will be. That prepares me for the next step in the process.

## **Step 2 Listen and Respond to Resisters**

Innovators and leaders can look upon those who are resistant to their ideas as

**adversaries. Usually it's a case of mistaken identity.**

**Rather than view them as enemies to be overcome, I prefer to see them as advisers, necessary in transforming a good idea into a great idea. Their resistance is useful. Like pain in the body, it lets me know something is out of adjustment.**

**By listening to resisters I learn where a change is most likely to go wrong. Resisters have an uncanny ability to point out all the potential flaws within a proposal. They are superb at finding the weaknesses and hidden defects within a plan. After all, they are motivated!**

**When we decided a few years ago to make home fellowships the axis of our ministry, we were launching into what were, for us, relatively uncharted waters. Though the fellowships were an excellent concept, there were many bugs to be worked out. The resisters helped us find them. Because they didn't like the plan in the first place, they were quick to point out a host of potential hazards.**

**They feared being stuck in geographical groupings where they would share little in common except neighborhood. They worried about studies that would be no more than a sharing of ignorance, fretted over sharing exercises that were too threatening, and rebelled against the idea of highly restrictive group covenants or contracts. In short, they set an agenda of things for us to work on.**

**Truth be known, listening and responding to their concerns didn't win everyone over. Some folks still dug in their heels. But listening and responding did help us put together a better, more acceptable home fellowship program.**

**Resisters are also great at pointing out hidden psychological barriers that have to be overcome before a change can take place. Just because something is a good idea is no guarantee that people will buy it. For instance, when microwave ovens first came out, their sales were limited because people weren't using them to cook meat. The problem wasn't technological; it was psychological. Most people considered meat inadequately cooked if it lacked the familiar brown odor on the outside. By listening to resisters (those who weren't buying the new ovens), the manufacturers were able to identify and remove this psychological barrier. They put browning elements in the ovens. Bingo! Sales increased dramatically.**

**When I'm trying to sell a change, I need to know the psychological barriers so I can tailor my presentation to overcome them. I realize that some pastors resist selling an idea, but I accept it as a necessary part of being a leader. If I am**



convinced that God wants a change made, or that a new program will bring great spiritual benefit to our people, then I have no qualms about trying to sell the idea. And if some "browning elements" are needed, so be it.

To identify psychological barriers, I ask myself two questions:

- i) *Are the resisters objecting to the proposal or the presenter?* Pious-sounding objections can be used to cover up the real source of resistance: lack of trust in the one making the proposal. Newly arrived pastors often face this, particularly when the church has a history of short pastorates. The same goes for pastors feuding with their board or a particular member. Resistance to their suggestions usually centers more on them than on the proposal itself.

In that case, it is a waste of time to discuss the issues. Instead, it's time to focus on building trust and restoring relationships, or finding someone else to champion the idea.

- ii) *Are the resisters objecting to the proposal or to the way it was presented?* I find the most common presentation problem is the use of offensive language—not swear words, but loaded terms and phrases that carry a negative connotation to the listeners. While serving as an assistant pastor, I suggested an internship program to disciple people planning to go into full-time ministry. Since our church was near a seminary and a couple of Christian schools, I figured the idea would go over big. It didn't. The board rejected it without discussion.

When I sought to understand the reasons for their opposition, I discovered my predecessor had been fired for focusing his ministry on a small group of "disciples" at the expense of everyone else. As a result, words like intern and discipleship conjured up images of favoritism. By using these terms in my proposal, I had unwittingly torpedoed my idea. The board wasn't against training people for future ministry; they opposed the abuse of the past.

So I reframed the proposal as a Vocational Ministry Training Program, spelled out some time limitations, and left the rest of the program virtually untouched. Within a month, I had not only my program (by unanimous consent); I had twice the funding I'd requested.

I find that listening and responding to resisters is a vital step in the change process. Not that I grant every critic veto power over potential

changes. But I assure my critics are, for the most part, honest and intelligent people who are concerned with different issues and problems. By carefully listening to their objections, I invariably end up with a much better idea or program.

### **Step 3 Sell Individuals before Groups**

The need to sell individuals before trying to sell the entire group is one of the most neglected rules of group persuasion. Years ago I saw a painful illustration of what happens when this principle is ignored. A long-range-planning committee, after nearly two years of work, held a special congregational meeting to review their findings and proposals. The presentation was beautifully done, and their proposals were excellent. But the congregation rejected their plans outright. The pastor and committee members were devastated. They had assumed a clear presentation of an excellent idea would result in congregational approval. They were wrong.

By presenting the proposal to the entire church first, the planning committee forced people to go public with their initial reactions. This practically guaranteed rejection, for two reasons. First, initial responses to change are often negative. Second, a public response is usually permanent. When an idea is presented to an entire group, everyone's opinion becomes a matter of public record, and public stands are hard to change. While people often talk themselves into an idea they initially rejected, they seldom do that once they've gone public with their opinion. That's why selling individuals first is so important. It makes it much easier for people to change their minds.

Another reason for first selling individuals is that most people won't adopt a new idea until they see that others have bought in. Those who study the process of change point out that only about 15 percent of us will adopt a new idea without first knowing who else is supporting it.

The long-range-planning committee assumed the only relevant question was "Is this a good idea?" They failed to realize that most folks also wanted to know "Who else is for it?" When they couldn't point to anyone but themselves, people considered the idea suspect. Selling some individuals before the meeting would have given their ideas credibility.

I've tried to sell individuals every time we've needed to add a new staff position. Before presenting the proposal to the congregation, I make sure the

staff, the board, and ten to twenty other people are solidly behind the idea. And when possible, we've set up a starter fund to help pay for the new position. That lets everyone know the idea has broad support, enough to have raised a few thousand dollars.

But even when all these steps have been followed, don't expect all resistance to melt away. The fact is, some people will be against every change—the sort of folks who would vote against the Second Coming if given a chance.

When faced with their opposition, I move into the last phase of the change process.

#### **Step 4 Lead Boldly**

By leading boldly, I don't mean running roughshod over those who disagree with me. I do mean stepping forward to champion a cause: clearly making my views known and doing everything I can to persuade the holdouts to follow.

For many of us, this type of leadership doesn't come easily. It runs counter to our image of a pastor as gentle shepherd. It forces people to act or react. And at times, it means offending a dear saint or long-time supporter, or even losing a key family.

Yet sometimes bold leadership is needed or inertia will rule. The fear of upsetting a few can allow a handful of critics to hold off an army of supporters. We can end up with a ministry that resembles a bus with one accelerator and sixty sets of brakes.

Just how bold to be depends on a variety of factors. First, there is the issue of God's will. The clearer I sense his leading, the bolder I am willing to be. But few changes are black and white. Only a few times in fifteen years of ministry have I pulled out the heavy artillery and publicly stated, "I'm positive God wants us to do this."

A second consideration is the price I will have to pay for boldly championing the cause. Determining that is the purpose of testing the waters. If the change is going to be too costly, bold leadership isn't a sign of valor; it's a sign of stupidity.

A third question I ask myself is, Whom will we lose? Notice, I don't ask if we will lose some people, but which ones. No ministry can keep everybody happy. Losing some folks to the church down the street is unavoidable. The only question is, Who will they be?

When our board and I made a commitment to contemporary worship music a few years ago, it didn't set well with a few old-timers. But prior to the change, we were losing a lot of visitors who didn't relate to traditional hymns. Many of these folks were outstanding Christians, the type of people we needed if we were going to expand our ministry. Even more significant, we weren't keeping many of the new Christians and non-Christians we were targeting.

There came a time when we had to ask, "Whom do we want to lose?" We decided we didn't want to keep losing the people we were losing. So we championed the change, and sure enough, we lost a few old-time families. But each time one family left, they were quickly replaced by three or four new ones who were looking for what we now had.

The final question I ask before pushing for a major change is, "How long do I plan to be around after the change is made?" If the answer is, "Not long," I don't push for the change.

A friend accepted a call to a small, struggling suburban church a few years ago. While the church had potential, it wasn't going to go anywhere without major changes. He began to make those: he altered the service, changed the constitution, and adapted the facility. Though difficult, and costly in the loss of a few families, the changes allowed the church to begin to grow finally.

The only problem was that he didn't stay long enough to firmly establish the changes. Not long after they were made, he left. When he returned to visit just two years after leaving, he was disappointed to find most of his changes had been reversed. The service, atmosphere, and low attendance were strikingly similar to what he had encountered when he first came.

Leading boldly requires staying. Change is always difficult, no matter how great the gains might be. Why send a body through loss of equilibrium if we aren't going to be around to help it regain balance? Why risk driving away key old-timers if we aren't going to remain to help the new folks gain a sense of ownership?

During the past nine years, our church has taken a new name, moved to a different location, shifted our program emphasis, changed board structure, and altered worship style. Yet these changes have been accomplished largely without conflicts and deviant behavior.

I remember when we went so far as to replace our Sunday evening service with home Bible studies. Not long after we dropped the evening service, a young

**father came to me**

**" I grew up in a church where every change was a major battle," he said. " So when I heard what you and the board were proposing, I was worried. My wife and I even thought of leaving before the battle broke out. We couldn't believe it when nothing happened. I still can't believe how easily people accepted the change."**

**It was not nearly as easy as it looked. But I was glad he saw it that way.**

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**N**avigating my way through unfamiliar streets, my thoughts darted between the task at hand—finding a pancake house at the edge of town—and the opportunities ahead of me as the new pastor of a small, Southern California church.

After eight years as a youth pastor and assistant pastor, I was excited by the challenge. As I pulled my Toyota into the restaurant's parking lot, I was full of ideas, energy, and enthusiasm. The chairman of our board had been in Europe while I candidated and was called, but at this pancake house we finally would have the chance to get acquainted.

After initial pleasantries, the chairman asked me what I had in mind for the church. For thirty minutes, I shared my dreams and vision.

When I finished, he leaned across the table. "Son," he said, "don't get too many

fancy ideas. You just preach and pray. We'll run the church. And don't dig your roots too deep, either, because it's a good idea to move on every three or four years."

I was stunned. Based on the interviewing process, I'd assumed people were looking to me to set the direction for our ministry. But it was painfully obvious that as far as he was concerned, I was an employee, not a leader. And something told me his opinions weren't to be taken lightly. Maybe it was the three offices he held—board chairman, treasurer, and finance elder.

### What's My Role?

Driving home, I knew we had a serious problem. Each of us saw himself as occupying the same role, the initiating leader.

Many, if not most, leadership teams experience such role confusion at one time or another, particularly when there's a new group of lay leaders or a new pastor has been brought onto the scene.

**I asked myself questions:** *Am I supposed to be the leader, taking charge, setting the agenda for ministry? Am I supposed to be the church's employee, waiting for order? Or am I the chaplain, carrying out the spiritual duties assigned by the board and not getting involved in the decision-making process?* **All my instincts told me that for the sake of an effective and growing ministry, I needed to function as an initiating leader. But before this could happen, the board and I needed to answer three key questions:**

### Whose Church Is It?

When a pastor finds, as I did, that some of the lay leaders don't want him to lead, it usually indicates that they see him as an outsider, a hired hand to take care of spiritual chores. And no one who cares a lick about his church is going to hand it over to an outsider.

Obviously, a church doesn't belong to anyone. It's the Lord's alone. But there is a legitimate sense in which people speak of a church as "their church." Those who have poured significant time, money, and energy into a local congregation rightfully feel a sense of ownership. After all, they have demonstrated love and concern for it.

A new pastor usually has an easy time leading these people as long as he leads them along the same road. But let him (or her) suggest a change in direction, and he'll quickly learn how little real leadership he's been granted. It doesn't matter if the changes are significant or minor; people soon will start asking, "What's she trying to do to *our church*?"

How important that pronoun is! Until the leaders are convinced it is as much my church as theirs, they will not let me function as their leader. A respected, influential, and honored outsider, perhaps, but an outsider nonetheless.

To overcome this, pastors need two things: time and a personal commitment to that local body.

There isn't much we can do about the passage of time. And exactly how much time is needed depends on factors such as the age of the church, the length of the previous pastorate, and our age in relation to the other leaders' ages.

But demonstrating commitment to the church is totally up to us. Until the board members are convinced the pastor is as committed to the church as they are, they won't let him lead.

Perceptions are sometimes more important than the reality. When we came to the church, my wife and I were committed to the church and community for the long haul, for better or for worse. We often said so during the candidating process. Yet, even after I had been around long enough to expect trust and tenure, I found some board members still resisting my leadership role.

Why? Because no matter what I said, their past experiences led them to believe I wouldn't stick around. Our board chairman, for example, had seen many a pastor come and go during his years of committee and board work. And since our church was small and struggling, and I was young and "on my way up," it's no wonder he was hesitant to turn over the reins. I would have been, too.

The board members had to see me demonstrate my commitment with my finances, my use of time, and my decisions to stay with the church even when opportunities to move came along.

Lay leaders may give lots of other reasons for resisting a pastor's leadership, but the real issue is usually a concern that he isn't as committed to the long-term ministry of the church as they are.

Frankly, they are often right. When a tough crisis comes along, many pastors bail out. One denominational study found a pastoral crisis occurred every year and a half. Not coincidentally, pastors from this same group moved on an average of every eighteen to twenty months. We may speak of a calling, but if our resumes reveal something that looks strangely like a career track, our lay leaders will know it.

Obviously, many pastors can't stay for the long haul, due to personal, geographical, and even denominational constraints. That's okay, as long as we don't usurp the authority and leadership of those who will be there for the long run. If, for whatever reason, we know our stay will be short, we need to let someone else take on the role of primary, initiating leader. A more appropriate role for us might be that of an influential consultant.

Aaron, for example, serves in a denomination that moves him to a new parish every three to five years. He sees no reason to battle for the reins; he knows he would lose. So when he arrives at a new church, he quickly tries to find out who the real power brokers are. Then he



pours his life into theirs. He knows that long after he's gone, they'll still be running the show, so he tries to influence rather than lead.

Pastors who want to take the responsibility of strong leadership have to give up the privilege of loose commitment. Only adequate time and our demonstrated commitment will help boards see that the church is not only theirs, but also ours.

### Who's Best Qualified to Lead?

Even if the pastor is as committed to the church as the rest of the board is, most lay leaders will want to know why the pastor should be the leader. Why not the chairman of the board, another lay person, or the entire board working together?

The answer is easy. In most cases, the pastor is best qualified to lead, not necessarily by virtue of age, intelligence, spirituality, or force of personality, for many board members can surpass their pastor in these areas, but by virtue of two key factors: time and training.

As a full-time pastor, I'm immersed in the day-to-day ministry of the church. Unlike any of my board members, I'm thinking about our problems and opportunities full-time. I have the time to plan, pray, consult, and solve problems.

To lead, a person needs to know the organization inside out—how the parts fit together and how each will be affected by proposed changes. And that takes time, lots of it. In all but the smallest churches, it can't be done on a spare-time basis. In a church with a multiple staff, Lyle Schaller claims, it takes between fifty and sixty hours a week.

Not that our board members are incapable of leading an organization. That's what a number do for a living. But they do it on a full-time basis. None would think of trying to do it in his or her spare time. Yet that is exactly what happens in a church where the board or a powerful lay leader tries to take on the primary leadership role.

I also have a decided advantage when it comes to training. Like most pastors, my formal education and ongoing studies have equipped me specifically to lead a church. Add to that a network of fellow pastors and church leaders, and I have a wealth of information from which to draw. When a church faces a tough situation or golden opportunity, the pastor is the one most likely to have been exposed to a similar situation. If not, he'll usually know where to find out what the experts recommend.

By contrast, most board members are limited in their exposure to other ministries. They don't have the time to read the literature. And their network of experts is usually limited to a previous pastor or two. Because the church is spiritually centered, volunteer run, and educationally focused, it's different from many other organizations, and as a rule, the pastor has more training in how to lead it than anyone else.

**Are there exceptions? Certainly, but that's the point they're exceptions. A friend tried to model his church after one with an incredibly strong and competent group of lay leaders. In his model church, the pastor simply prayed, taught, and counseled, while the elders took care of everything else. There was no need for strong pastoral leadership, he told me, if you picked the right people and disciplined them properly. But he failed to notice that the key elders in his model church were self-employed and independently wealthy. They had all the time in the world, and they attended seminars and seminary classes and read in their spare time.**

**His elders, on the other hand, all had jobs that called for fifty to sixty hours a week. They had neither the time nor the training to take a strong leadership role. As long as my friend waited for the elders to take charge, the church floundered.**

**What about pastors who feel they aren't cut out to take a strong leadership role?**

**In a smaller church, a key lay person might be able to fill the role. While it's not the ideal (due to the time and training constraints we've just looked at, as well as the problems it might create for the next pastor, should he want to take back the reins), it sometimes has to be done if the church is going to move ahead.**

**A staff member might be another option. I know one church where the associate pastor was a stronger leader than the senior pastor, so the pastor let him lead. They had known each other for a long time, and they had a great deal of mutual trust and respect, so it worked well for them.**

**One thing won't work: The pastor can't be a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde Leader, someone who abdicates leadership and later jumps in to take over. That only confuses, embarrasses, and annoys the people who have been pushed aside in the attempt to rescue the situation.**

**In short, the role of primary leader needs to be filled on a protracted basis, and usually the pastor is the best person to fill it.**

### **Can a Strong Leader Be Controlled?**

**Before being allowed to take a strong leadership role, most pastors have to clear one more hurdle: the fear of domination. It doesn't matter how committed or qualified a pastor might be, his or her leadership will be resisted if people think it smacks of domination.**

**Most people fear a dictatorship, even a benevolent one. Nearly everyone has a horror story of a strong leader gone bad. And the fear is even greater in churches, like mine, that have a heritage of congregational government. To some folks, strong leadership and domination are synonymous. Before they'll let a pastor lead, they have to be thoroughly convinced that appropriate checks and balances are firmly in place.**

**As far as I'm concerned, those fears are justified. I know my sin nature too well to want**

*carte blanche.* I've committed myself to follow three key guidelines not only to keep me in line, but also to allay the fears of those who are most suspicious of a strong leader.

1. *I present first drafts, not final proposals.* I don't mean that I offer half-baked ideas or suggestions off the top of my head. My first drafts are carefully thought out and forcefully presented. But I don't confuse them with God's final revealed will on a subject. That's something the board and I will determine together.

It's easy for a strong leader to make it sound as if every idea he has came directly from God, completely developed, needing nothing but the board's approval. But that puts the board in an awkward position not fellow leaders seeking to know God's will, but judges passing judgment on God's ideas. When that happens, boards that hate conflict become a rubber stamp. Those that fear domination dig in and become an adversary.

When Don sought to lead his board, for example, he presented his ideas as straight from the Lord. Fearing domination, some of the board members began to resist his leadership. Even when they might otherwise have agreed with his proposals, they put up a fight. It was the only way they knew to keep him from taking total control.

In Don's eyes, the board was carnal. After a few years, he left to go to a church where people were more open to God's leading. But he soon found the same thing happening again.

Sadly, the resistance wasn't so much to Don's ideas as to his style. If he had offered the same ideas as first-draft proposals, many of them would have been supported.

2. *I keep no secrets from the board.* When I keep something from the board, perhaps because of its sensitive nature, I'm putting them at a decided disadvantage. If they make a different decision than they would have with all the facts, they've been duped and manipulated.

For instance, I used to see no reason why the board needed to know the details of the spiritual and moral struggles our people went through. That was privileged communication between pastor and parishioner. But when it came to making decisions about people, the board and I had two sets of information.

I now ask most people who come to me for help if I can share the situation with the elders if I need to. I'm not the least bit apologetic. If it's a significant issue, I simply say, "The elders need to know about this. Can I tell them?" Almost everyone says yes. If not, I honor their request, but I also suggest they go to

someone else for counsel because the elders and I jointly shepherd the flock, and we can't do our job if we keep secrets from one another.

To my surprise, no one has ever gotten upset or angry or left the church over this. In fact, most folks seem to appreciate it.

That doesn't mean I share every gory detail or all the little problems that arise, but I have permission to share information the board needs to know in order to make wise decisions.

I learned the importance of the guideline the hard way. During my third year at the church, I found myself accused of misleading and manipulating the board. Though my motives were pure, I stood guilty as charged.

We had hired a staff member who wasn't working out. During his first year, I received numerous complaints about his failure to follow through on plans and commitments. I kept the comments to myself, figuring it was my role to be a staff advocate. But before long, the board heard some complaints on their own. At a later budget meeting, a couple of elders suggested we let this staff member go. During the discussion, I made no mention of the calls I'd received or my own growing frustration. Instead, I pointed out the good things he had done (and there were many). We ended up giving him a raise!

But a year later, I realized things weren't going to work out. Along with the other problems, now the staff member and I weren't getting along. So I went to the board and told them I thought we should make a change. They were perplexed. How could I defend his work one year and ask for his release the next? When I explained what really had been going on, some board members became indignant. Why hadn't they been informed before?

The truth was, I didn't trust them to deal with the information. I was afraid they might overreact. But that only revealed the hollowness of my claims to believe in a leadership team. I had taken on the role not of a strong leader but a manipulator. I promised myself it would never happen again.

**3** *I follow the board's advice.* Some people confuse leadership with infallibility. They assume that submitting to others means abdicating their leadership role.

Jim is a case in point. Whenever his board resisted an idea or asked him to go in another direction, he found a way to get around their advice. It never occurred to him that God might want him to follow the board's direction. It's no surprise that Jim constantly complained about his board's unwillingness to follow his lead. What he called *leadership* they called a refusal to cooperate. They never did

**develop a relationship of trust.**

**I' ve committed myself to follow the board' s advice not only because I want to avoid the resistance that comes with a domineering leadership style, but also because I want to be a wise leader. Both life and Scripture have taught me that wisdom is found in heeding counsel, even when I think it' s wrong.**

**Even when I' m right on an issue, I can be wrong on the timing. Often, the Lord has used the board' s hesitancy to slow me down. For instance, the board' s caution caused me to move much more slowly with changing our worship music from traditional to contemporary. The switch was accomplished without even a minor church fight because it was done at the right time and at the right pace. Submitting to their will, rather than looking for a way to get around it, has kept my a great idea from premature birth.**

**There are only two circumstances under which I wouldn' t submit to the board' s direction. First, if they wanted me to violate what I understood to be the clear teaching of Scripture, as happened to one pastor whose board wanted to financially support an organization that was pro-abortion. Second, if they asked me to disobey what I understood to be the clear and unmistakable voice of the Lord. In the last nine years that' s happened only once.**

**I was pushing for us to hire someone from within the body to fill an associate pastor position. While he was a gifted and anointed man of God, at that time he lacked a seminary education and had never worked in a church. Understandably, some of the board members were hesitant; they wanted to hire someone who had been around the block before.**

**But one night, driving home from a meeting, I felt God made it absolutely clear to me that we were supposed to hire Mike. It was one of those supernatural moments when you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God has spoken. So I went to the board and told them, " I strongly feel that God wants us to hire Mike."**

**Some of them were taken aback, but they didn' t argue. " Fine," they said, " we' ll present him to the congregation."**

**It turned out to be one of the most important decisions we' ve made. Within months, even those who had voiced the most concern over his qualifications were singing his praises. Yet I' m sure the board never would have gone along with me if I hadn' t followed their direction previously, even when it differed from mine.**

**I' ve found the more successful and experienced we become as leaders, the easier it is to ignore those who disagree. But anyone who' s tempted not to follow the**

**board's advice should consider the options. If he is lucky, the board members will dig in their heel, providing a check against tyranny. If he's not, they'll let him have everything he wants, a fate much worse than staunch resistance. Sooner or later, he'll make a terrible decision, and there will be no one to stop him.**

**Research has shown that strong pastoral leadership is a key ingredient in a healthy and growing church. But it can't be demanded or taken. It has to be granted. The board needs to be convinced that (1) we're committed to the church, (2) we are qualified to lead, and (3) we desire to lead, not dominate.**

**Asking these three questions, and thoughtfully answering them, will help lead us to more effective pastor-board relationships.**