

Nine Characteristics of Turnaround Leaders

From Gene Wood, author of *Leading Turnaround Churches*

The credentials of turnaround leaders differ in several ways from those of Christian pastors in general.

1. They see themselves as servants of Christ and of His Church. They have a way of connecting with people and drawing them into the ministry of the church. They lead from considerate, compassionate hearts.

"Whenever possible don't take anything away. Simply add the positive... Leadership by additions is almost always preferable to replacement. It requires no permission. The old established ministries must be maintained for a time to silence opposition."

"Of course no matter how positive the additions to ministry are, some will not be happy...It makes little sense to allow a disgruntled minority to hold the church captive. Many church patriarchs have grown accustomed to simply shaking their head "no" and everything stopping dead in its tracks. No longer. Their participation is certainly welcome, but the new exciting and biblical ministries will go on with or without them." (p. 90)

2. They shoulder responsibility for the vision and mission of the church, they attract ownership of that vision and they demonstrate flexibility on the details. They keep the big picture in mind and focus church activities and procedures on fulfilling the mission to which God called them and the congregation. This clear calling becomes a source of ministry authority.

"Too many leaders confuse responsibility ("response able") with recognition and credit. When success follows, share the praise with others. Without a committed laity, nothing of lasting value will occur. It is astounding how many "leaders" are too quick to receive the pat on the back for success, and run for cover when the charts turn south." (p. 91)

"Surprising as it may seem, the larger the organization, the smaller the decision making groups need to be. Also the larger the church the smaller the percentage of congregants needed to own a project or direction in order for it to be successful." (p. 94)

"If someone is to be a turnaround leader, he will be challenged. The dynamics of a decaying church are simply too convoluted for it to be any other way. Why bail out? ...it may not hurt to have your denominational leader give you a promise of backing prior to accepting the call to a

historically troubled church. If these [denominational] leader are naïve enough to thing the turnaround can be done without bloodshed, they simply should not be in that position.”(p. 96)

3. They avoid a church that does not desire to become healthy. Focused leaders, whether pastors or lay leaders, grow weary of stagnation and eventually leave if mission and vision are constantly confined. They have an “A-Z Discernment” before accepting the call (selected discernment letters follow):

A. Do they have a heartfelt desire for someone to lead them? Is this at the top of their pastoral profile?

B. Was the cause of their decline a combination of dynamics which can be changed? (such as a the death of well-loved pastor, a moral failure, etc.?)

D. Without prompting, do they admit they are on the edge? Do they have realistic appraisal of their condition?

E. Is the location one which permits vigorous life? Is there room fro parking expansion?

J. Are there one or two families carrying more than 30% of the church budget? What solid reason do you have to believe their financial deep pockets will all you to lead?

M. How does your wife feel?

P. Are they requiring you to retain all the existing staff?

T. What does the predecessor have to say? Does it match what you were told by the pulpit committee?

*Z. Are you ready to commit at least seven years to this ministry?
(pp. 97-98)*

4. They come to a meeting of hearts early in the process. Many pastors and lay leaders insist on “prenuptial agreements,” an understanding of what to anticipate in this ministry union.

5. They never backtrack, but have a fixed forward focus. Some form of change is always needed if the Body of Christ is to flourish. To grow is to change and, while it is natural, change is uncomfortable. It creates conflict, even chaos at times, but focused leaders refuse to panic, working together to ensure that

the chaos leads to creative and beneficial ministry. Having a "together team" of leaders ensures that all their gifts are employed to keep the ship on course during the temporary storm.

Change always entails bringing new lay leadership into the loop. This threatens those who have sacrificed finances, time and energy to maintain the church for years. (p. 107)

To avoid backtracking:

Know your Bible

Know your by-laws

Know your backing

Know your "Bob" (Robert's Rule of Order)—[I disagree with this and recommend Q & A meetings before voting]

(pp. 108-114)

6. They control their temper through the Spirit's enabling and the mutual accountability they share with fellow leaders and mentors. They depersonalize attacks and understand the dynamics of opposition coalitions. They avoid standing alone but employ the wisdom of fellow leaders. They care for themselves by having time away from the stresses of interpersonal conflict, and they exercise care about the information they share and with whom they share it.

7. They are discreet about what they share with others.

An old military expression is an excellent reminder for pastors: "Loose lips sink ships" (p. 119)

"When entering a troubled church it is wise to initially process you thinking with someone outside the congregation. (p. 121)

8. They are willing to confront the sin of divisiveness. They adhere to the direct teaching of God's Word in this matter.

(Titus 3:10-11 NIV) Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. 11 You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

9. They possess "growth vision" with a passion to see God's kingdom grow. Their motives may be questioned at times, but they fiercely believe God is building His Church through them. They have a holy discontentment unless there

1

is real evidence for healthy growth. Therefore they engage all their powers to discern and nurture God's unique vision for the ministries to which God has called them. Leaders who spend time on their knees together in prayer, at a table together in fellowship and in the board room together planning for church health, develop tenacity to see the vision through.

Some of the motive attacks a turnaround leader may hear:

- *All he cares about is numbers*
- *He doesn't care about older people.*
- *He only spends time with new members*
- *All he wants is a yes-board*
- *He is trying to get ride of everyone who has been in the church for more than a decade*
- *Everything needs to be done his way.*
- *Pastor just wants to have a mega-church.*
- *He is more interested in business principles than biblical principles.*
- *Pastor has no heart for missions.*
- *Pastor wants a larger church so he can be paid more.*

(pp. 133-34)

"What works in one church may be counterproductive in another."

(p. 136)