

Disciple Making Leaders

A significant focus of Jesus' ministry was making disciples who would bring other people to Jesus to be reconciled with God and one another. Matthew 28:19-20 tells us that Jesus' plan for expanding and extending the church is to provide for the growth and development of people into his disciples. As followers we need to ask if we are becoming better disciples. As leaders we need to regularly evaluate our effectiveness in helping all people, not just newcomers, become better disciples. This means that we must focus – as Jesus did during his earthly ministry and still does – on being “people developers.”

Jesus knew that he needed disciples to continue his mission. And while the disciples' confused questions must have seemed annoying and slowed down other aspects of his ministry, Jesus took the time to help the disciples understand and grow. The disciples were in turn able to help with tasks and use their gifts in ministry. Ultimately disciples will reach “all nations” by also helping others to grow and use their gifts as disciples. As people discover that Jesus and his disciples offer an opportunity for personal growth and relationship with God and one another, they are attracted to Jesus. Helping to develop people brings in even more people.

Developing people takes many gifts and we can each improve our skills. There is no single way to help others grow, and each people developer has his or her own style. Some helpful things to keep in mind are:

- Church leaders can help develop a vision that will transform the community from maintaining the status quo to building on new opportunities. And leaders also need to make each person responsible for helping to meet that vision and for his or her own spiritual development. We need to share the challenges and explain the boundaries, then stand aside and let others have at it.
- Church leaders need to delegate everything they possibly can. This not only helps them retain their energy and sanity, it encourages others to grow. To fully become the Body of Christ, we need to discern the calling and capabilities of each person and give them as much authority and responsibility as they can handle. The challenge is that this requires leaders to know their people, particularly their aspirations, and to make assignments with personal development in mind.
- Church leaders need to let go of fears and give others room to grow. It will take time for people to learn new things. They will make mistakes. Some of them will take over positions or responsibilities leaders have held. Some will become critics. These are not good reasons for holding on to all of the responsibilities. Leaders who maintain tight control over everything and everyone do not understand the paradox of power: the more power you give away, the more you have.
- Although offering training is important, people development is much more than training; people need to share in special tasks and projects and discuss their experiences with one another. Personal growth requires participation in activities and involvement in working

through problems. For example, a person can't learn enough about pastoral care without doing it. Christianity is not a worldview but a way of life.

- Personal development is a journey, not a position or an achievement. Moving on needs to be a goal, and church leaders need to help people find new and fulfilling ministries after they have performed their ministries for reasonable periods of time. It's healthy from the very beginning of a new ministry to estimate a time to move on, assuming this fits the individual's development plan and aspirations. Accordingly, positions such as on a church governing board may be limited to three years.
- Nothing is more rewarding or loving than helping another person with personal development opportunities. Christian love means helping one another grow without placing our own limits on another person's growth; it means raising others up as our peers or leaders as they are called and capable (even when we are more senior or more experienced, etc.).
- People development is a challenge in every church community. This challenge becomes especially prominent in the size transition from a pastoral size congregation to a program size congregation because the congregation can no longer exclusively rely on the priest to act as a people developer.

Most people (and communities) are not natural people developers. Judging by historical results, there is no better people developer than Jesus. So we need to pray and encourage others to pray for his help in becoming leaders who help Jesus make new and stronger disciples. As he says, Jesus is with us always in this process.