

Church Leadership

—101—

What Every Church Leader Needs to Know

by Greg Atkinson

Church Leadership 101: What Every Church Leader Needs to Know

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INTRODUCTION

I've had some interesting conversations and some frustrating experiences in my career and it led me to a series of blog posts that is now an eBook. Basically, after almost two decades of local church ministry combined with consulting with churches around the country (and running my own business), I have formed some leadership philosophies and best practices, and would like to share them with you here.

Please understand my heart and intent is to sincerely help you be better at what you do and help you be a better, more effective, more understanding and stronger leader. I encourage you to read this with an open mind and zoom in on the chapters that you need to focus on most. I also encourage you to share this with your staff/team.

I know some of you are my peers. Many of you have been at this longer and have much to offer. Some of you are new to ministry or are still hungry and wanting to grow in your given ministry. What I'm wanting to discuss is born out of life experience – not really book knowledge. It'll be a combination of common sense mixed with wisdom that I've learned along the way. Whatever your situation, I think you'll be able to learn or re-learn something useful as well as contribute to the conversation via email. If you think of another 101 lesson that you'd like me to write about in a follow-up eBook, email me at greg@gregatkinson.com.

For this introduction, I'd like you to send me your best tips for church leadership. What have you learned the hard way? What do you consider to be essential? What's one thing you think every other pastor, staff member and volunteer should know?

1

THE INTERRUPTIONS AREN'T INTERRUPTIONS



Yeah, I said it. When you get that knock on your door and look up to see someone standing in your doorway saying, “Do you have a moment?” – they’re not interrupting your work. They ARE your work. Ministry is about people; it always has been and always will be.

One thing that bugs me is hanging out with pastors that say (not jokingly), “Ministry would be great if it weren’t for the people.” It pains my heart that pastors and Church leaders don’t get this simple truth. We are the Body of Christ and every member is important and special. We are called to shepherd God’s people and that involves getting our hands dirty and yes, being bothered and interrupted.

IMPORTANT: This isn’t about being an introvert or extrovert. This is about being sensitive to the Holy Spirit, Who is always at work around us. As ministers, we should seek the opportunities to show and express Christ’s love to those we lead and serve.

Speaking of seeking opportunities: You have to be intentional. What does

your weekly schedule look like? How many breakfasts, coffees and lunches do you schedule each week? I fill my calendar with people meetings and have for 18 years. If you go from administrative meeting to meeting and never schedule any time with your volunteers and staff, you're missing a crucial part of leadership and the opportunity to be God in the flesh to someone in need.

So where do you go from here? Here's an action item: When you notice someone down, frustrated, hurt or just not themselves, you should take the initiative to ask if they need someone to talk to or how you can pray for them. When you're in the midst of busy/office work and someone calls, texts, emails, IMs, or drops by your office – take the time to listen and serve. Be the hands and feet of Christ to those you come in contact with – it's what we're called to do and you'll be a better and more trusted, respected and loved leader because of it.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

So – confession time: Have you ever been in the midst of busy/office work and had someone drop by un-announced? How did you handle it? Do you have the presence of mind to be sensitive to the Spirit?

2

DON'T WASTE MY TIME



It's the thought and unspoken cry of all of your volunteers: "Don't waste my time." This is a lesson I learned at the age of 21 and have practiced for the last 14 years. Adults lead busy lives. They have families and hard jobs and show up at a rehearsal tired, frazzled and a little ready to walk out the door at the drop of a hat. It's crucial that you as the leader understand the two P's: Be PUNCTUAL and Be PREPARED.

First, be punctual. Punctual is defined as strictly observant of an appointed or regular time; not late; prompt." This issue is what really inspired this series of Church Leadership 101. This past Sunday night I was dropping my kids off at a children's function at a church. My wife normally takes them on Sunday nights, so this was my first time taking them to this event. The function started at 5:30pm so I arrived at 5:15pm. The parking lot was empty. I thought this event must have been cancelled for this week. I guess the other families are so used to the leader showing up late that they arrive right at 5:30pm.

I sat in my car upset and frustrated that this leader was wasting my time, as

I couldn't just leave my kids with no one there to watch them, I had to wait for this leader to show up and unlock the church. You know what time she finally showed up? 5:38pm! I was furious. I started to gather my kids from the playground and say, "Let's leave." – as to teach the leader this very basic leadership principle: "Don't waste my time."

Hear me: If an event or activity starts at 5:30pm, the leader should arrive at least by 5:15pm. At the very least. Leaders should be the first to arrive and the last to leave. Every ministry and rehearsal I've ever led, I've been the first to arrive. This is Church Leadership 101. And worship leader friends – don't play the "artist" card. Nobody wants to hear that you're an artist and you're never on time. Get a watch and be prompt and punctual. Moving on...

The second P is prepared. Never waste your team's time at a meeting or rehearsal. If you're leading a meeting, have a set agenda and stick to it. If you're leading a rehearsal, have the worship sets, service orders and music charts all set, prepared and ready to go. When my band walked into rehearsal they could always go straight to their music stand and find their folder with the set list and all the charts 3 hole punched and placed in order in their folder. I even had the corners of pages turned up and ready to be flipped. I had special notes highlighted for each player and a big mark showing them when to come in and start playing.

It's a matter of respect and understanding. You must realize that your volunteers lead busy lives and they will leave your ministry if you're not punctual and prepared. These are two key factors that I teach when I speak on "How to Attract and Keep Quality Musicians." You have to always keep in mind that time is the most precious thing any of us have. You can get more money. You can never get back time. When you waste time – it's gone... forever.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

How can you improve in this area of your ministry and leadership? Are you the first to arrive for a meeting or rehearsal? Do you have the mindset that early is on time and on time is late?

3

YOU'RE UNDER AUTHORITY



I'll make this brief: Anyone in ministry is a person under authority. From the senior pastor answering to a board, trustees or the congregation (depending on your governance) to the executive pastor answering to the senior pastor, to all staff (paid and volunteer) answering to the executive pastor or senior pastor. Everyone reports to somebody and should be held accountable.

Ultimately, we all answer to the Head of the Church: Jesus Christ. Colossians 3:23 tells us “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.” But on a practical, day-to-day working relationship, how does this whole concept work itself out?

Basically, we need to keep in mind that there are no lone rangers in ministry. Ministry should be done as a team and everyone should have someone that holds them accountable for goals set, discipline, and growth as a professional and a leader.

In a meeting, when something is being discussed, you have every right to speak up, voice your opinion and fight for something you're passionate about, but once the decision has been made, you must get on board and champion that cause as if it was your idea.

Last week, I spoke at the National Outreach Convention in San Diego. I met a man from a known church in Texas and he told me he was on staff there and I went on to share with him my experience of visiting there and taking a tour. My team and I, years earlier, had been led on a tour by a disgruntled staff member who bashed the pastor and begged us to hire him. It was horrible. I remember driving away from that church and hearing our pastor say, "Don't ever act like that to visitors."

If you have something against your senior leadership (pastor, executive pastor, or elders/deacons) – keep that to yourself and take the initiative to seek them out (Matt. 18) and discuss your grievance with them privately. Don't bad mouth your leadership to others inside or outside the church.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

So, what about you? How do you handle issues of authority in your situation? Have you ever fought hard for an idea and had it shot down? How did you respond?

4

SOMETIMES YOU CAN AND SHOULD GET FIRED



Yesterday was a happy day for me (a huge Cowboys fan). I had been campaigning for years to get Wade Phillips fired. Actually, I never wanted him to get hired (there's a lesson there – make sure you hire the right people), but I had spent the last 3 years calling for his firing.

Bottom-line: If you can't do your job and do it well, you don't deserve a job. We are living in a tough economic time right now where people are hungry (literally) for work and would give anything to have your secure job. There's no place for laziness or lack of leadership and initiative in any industry – including the Church.

As someone who consults with churches and organizations, having spent a lot of time with senior pastors and executive pastors, I know that there comes a time when it is no longer wise or healthy to keep someone on your staff. Please know that I don't take this lightly and I know the sting of what it's like being on the other end (having been laid off due to a church's

financial situation). I know that the employee has a family and this will be extremely difficult to cope with, but if an employee has been warned before and encouraged to change their attitude, work ethic or make progress in their given ministry area – it is something that is warranted and a leadership call that senior leaders need to make.

Am I just talking about paid staff members? Absolutely not. If you remember, 2 years ago I blogged about firing a volunteer. You can and should read it [HERE](#). By the way, the Part Two of that story is after months of not serving and several meetings with the volunteer (including asking him to read “The Heart of the Artist”), he came back on the team with a great attitude, humbleness and we’re still friends to this day. When I’m back in Dallas, I can still see this volunteer and hang out with him (go out to eat, catch some live music, or go see a movie). We’re really friends – even after having to fire him for a season.

Do I believe in grace? BIG TIME. It’s my favorite word. Do I believe in second and third chances? Yes. Do I believe in coaching and leading someone to a better place in their career? Yes – if they’re willing, able, humble and teachable. I also write and teach on innovative organizations allowing and sometimes encouraging failure as they take strides towards new approaches to ministry and innovative breakthroughs. What I’m talking about here is one’s heart, attitude, work ethic and what they bring to your team or organization as a whole – also how they impact those around or under them. All this must be taken into account.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

How do you handle unhealthy situations on your team? Have you had to fire a staff member or volunteer? Have you ever been fired and learned a hard lesson? What’s your thoughts on this?

5

DON'T BURN BRIDGES



In light of my last Church Leadership 101 post on being fired, I'd like to follow up with a simple philosophy I've tried to live by: never burn bridges. When I have felt God leading me somewhere else and resigned from a church, I've bent over backwards to make the transition as smooth as possible.

I've always worked with key volunteers in my ministry that would carry the load until the church replaced me. I thought it was important to set them up to win and show them everything I did, where I kept stuff, where I ordered stuff from, how I planned, scheduled and organized and anything that I thought they'd need to know after I left.

This speaks to one's character and to a Kingdom mindset. We're not competing and other churches are not the enemy. Even if I (or you) leave a church, I want them to succeed and do well in my absence – they are a part of the Big "C" Church and I'm all for their continued success.

If for some reason you find yourself fired or being let go, you have a wonderful opportunity to live out this principle of not burning bridges and show them you have class. I worked with a youth pastor one time that got fired and acted like a complete moron afterwards. He kept the church keys and wouldn't turn them back in (we had to change the locks), he kept his pager (yes, we had pagers back in the day) and he threatened to storm the pulpit on Sunday and "tell his side of the story" (we had to post police officers at all entrances). In the end, he looked like a jerk and people really questioned his mental stability. Best advice: don't go there. Turn in your keys, pack up your office and leave with dignity.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

How have you handled transitions in your career? What do you think about burning bridges?

6

MENTOR AND HAVE A MENTOR



There's only one quality that I'm proud to tell others about me and don't mind sharing. It's a quality I also look for in others. And that is – I'm teachable. As long as I live, I'll be a life-long learner. Partly because of the way I'm wired and I'm a reader, but also because I have a thirst to grow in knowledge.

Wherever I've lived and served, I've found someone to mentor me and I've tried to be a mentor to others. I've mentored guys younger and older than me (mostly younger). I've always found someone older than me and met with them regularly to learn from them and pick their brain.

There are many reasons to seek out a mentor. I must say again that it's crucial to have a teachable spirit and sincerely believe you have room to grow and learn from another. One reason to seek out a mentor is to grow spiritually. Sometimes a mentor is further along spiritually than you and can disciple/mentor you in your walk with Christ.

Sometimes I seek out a mentor that is an awesome husband and father. I see how this person loves their wife and kids and I feel I could grow from spending time with them.

I don't know about you, but I want to learn how to be a better husband and father.

Sometimes I seek out a mentor that can help me grow professionally and as a leader. I met once a week with a man that used to work with Ken Blanchard and helped write the book *Lead Like Jesus*. He's led workshops on Blanchard's "situational leadership" and countless "Lead Like Jesus" workshops and seminars. We met weekly for him to pour into me and teach me about leadership (both situational leadership and servant leadership).

There are many reasons to be mentored and as you're able to share what you, yourself, have learned over the years – you can mentor someone younger and pass on what you've been taught or learned the hard way.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

So what about you? Do you have a mentor? If so, tell us about it. Do you mentor others? If so, tell us about it.

7

LEAD LIKE JESUS



A foundational concept and principle for all Church leaders is to lead like Jesus and be a servant leader. If you haven't already, I'd strongly encourage you to read Ken Blanchard's book *Lead Like Jesus*.

I still remember years ago at the Catalyst Conference hearing Andy Stanley speak on being the most powerful person in the room. There are times when you're in a meeting and you realize you're the most powerful person in the room. Andy pointed out that when Jesus realized this he took out a towel and basin and began washing the disciples feet.

Another great book to get you pumped up and focused on serving is by my friend, Dino Rizzo. If you haven't read *Servolution* yet, I encourage you to get it and read it. At the end of the day, it's so crucial to realize we're in this for people – real people – and we're called to serve them.

One final book suggestion is a book that was foundational in my own ministry. If you haven't already, get and read (devour) *Spiritual Leadership* by Henry Blackaby. This book is gold!

One thing my mentor is walking me through is how Jesus responded to situations. After all, this whole concept centers around leading like Jesus would.

In order to understand the heart, mind and leadership skills of Christ, all one has to do is read through the Gospels. I know you've read them before, but go back and read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John through the lens of leading like Jesus and see if you learn something new and God through the Holy Spirit can open your heart to true servant leadership.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

As a leader, is this at the core of who you are? Do you first think to lead like Jesus?

8

YOU HAVE AN ENEMY



Years ago I read a book called *The Bondage Breaker* by Neil Anderson. In the book, Neil says of spiritual warfare, “If you’re a Christian, you’re a target. If you’re in ministry, you’re a bullseye.” That statement struck me hard and has always stayed with me.

The Bible warns us, too. 1 Peter 5:8 says, “Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.” Later verse 9 goes on to say, “Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.”

So, we are encouraged to “stay alert” and “watch out”. We’re also told to “stand firm” and “be strong”. We’re also reminded that Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are fighting this same battle with a very real enemy.

It’s important to keep this perspective as you go throughout your ministry career. You have a enemy – a shrewd, crafty and tricky, deceitful enemy that will do whatever it takes to frustrate you, discourage you, make you afraid, see you stumble and fall into sin and if he was allowed to – he’d kill you. This should sober you up and behoove you to put on your spiritual armor. (Ephesians 6:13-17)

How do serve, lead and minister with this reality going on all around you? I've blogged before about the supernatural aspect of our faith. We serve a God that was raised from the dead and believe in angels and demons and a real devil. I pray over our house every night before going to sleep. I ask God to let his angels stand guard over our home and protect us from evil.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

What about you? How does the reality that you have an enemy effect your life and ministry? Do you think about this at all? Do you intentionally put on your spiritual armor?

9

STAY HUMBLE



Continuing on with the Church Leadership 101 series, we've come to a section of chapters that start with the word "stay". The first one is to stay humble. I know this is easier said than done, but I think it's a sobering thought to keep our pride (which we all struggle with), ego and attitudes in check.

Some of the best advice someone gave me years ago was to not take myself too seriously. I've tried to live by that and laugh a lot. Does my pride sometimes still flare up? Absolutely. Does my ego pop up from time to time. Sure. But I eventually come to my senses, repent and get back to a Christ-centered, God-sized view of who I am and Who He is.

This concept is especially challenging for gifted and talented individuals. Some pastors can really preach. Some worship leaders are very good musicians. Some video editors have mad skills. Some designers – well all designers have egos, but the point is a lot of Church leaders are talented and it's easy to see why they wrestle with staying humble.

The problem is when we start relying on our strength, skills and ability and stop praying for Christ through the Holy Spirit to lead through us, preach and teach through us, sing and play through us, edit and design through us.

We must have the perspective of vessels, jars of clay and a Heavenly Potter sculpting us and shaping us and using us for great things according to His plans and His purpose.

So to keep it short and sweet, stay humble. Talk less. Listen more. Stay grounded. Keep your eyes on Christ and follow His example:

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, **he humbled himself** by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” – *Philippians 2:5-11 (NIV)*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

What can we learn from this passage in Philippians? How easily can pride creep into our lives? Who is the most humble person you know? What attracts you to them?

10

STAY ON YOUR KNEES



Like I said in the last chapter, staying humble is easier said than done. I don't expect you to do it in your own power. That brings us to today's principle: stay on your knees. It's important that we are men and women of prayer. When we have a vibrant relationship with Christ and spend time communicating with Him in prayer, the natural attitude that will come out of us is one of humility. This is also where the fruits of the Spirit flourish.

Prayer is the lifeline for the Christian leader and pastor. Prayer keeps you grounded, focused, connected, informed, encouraged and most of all – it displays a true dependence on God. We all need to be dependent on God and the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. Not praying shows a spirit of independence and thus leads to an attitude of pride and also can become overwhelming. We feel like the weight of the world is on our shoulders and get stressed out.

I don't have to tell you what a huge problem burnout is for ministers, but I would like to point out that I think this concept is a great contributor to our burnout epidemic as a Church. Leaders try to operate out of their own strength and eventually crumble under the pressure.

Only dedicated time with God and hearing from His heart can fuel us and also keep us from sin (pride, lust, ambition to the point of sin, drivenness to the point of sin, etc.).

Staying on our knees (along with staying in the Word, which we'll cover next) is absolutely essential to your (and my) physical, spiritual and emotional health. At the end of the day, it all comes down to health. We want to be healthy in every way possible. Prayer can calm the storm that rages within and all around us.

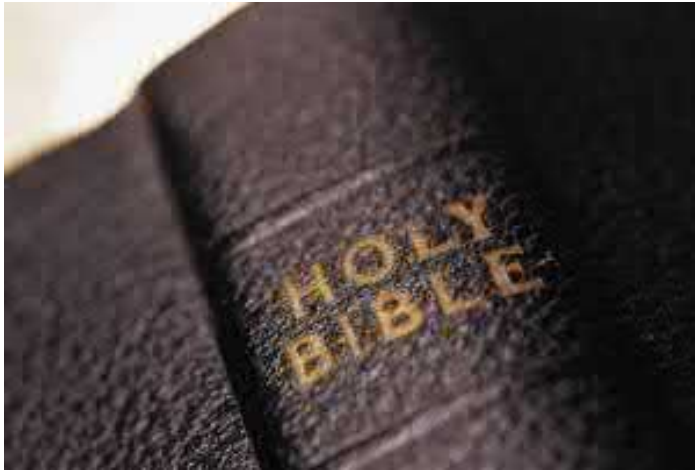
Prayer (and staying on your knees) is also a huge acknowledgement of submission to God. We acknowledge Christ as Lord and submit to His will, His way, His purpose.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

So... how's your prayer life going? When you pray is it a one-way conversation or a dialogue? How do you practice listening to His still, small voice?

11

STAY IN THE WORD



Nothing gives you perspective, hope, guidance, direction, wisdom and encouragement like the Holy Bible – it’s a remarkable book. I remember years ago hearing Henry Blackaby say “When you read the Word, it’s as if you’re staring right in the face of God.” That always comforted and excited me to think about.

As Christians and Church leaders, we desire to have the fruits of the Spirit flow through us and out of us. Thanks to the book *The Spirit of the Disciplines* I read years ago, I learned that the fruit of the Spirit is something that happens naturally when we have a steady, real and vibrant relationship with Christ.

I grew up in a youth group (like many of you I’m sure) where I was taught wrongly that we were supposed to “work” at each fruit. They would say, “This week we want you to concentrate on being gentle.” (or kind or patient, etc.) This is how I was brought up.

Reading that book as an adult, my eyes were opened to the reality that we can't beat these fruits into us – they must develop overtime in prayer and the Word. And as we become more and more like Christ, our natural reaction when tough or unexpected things happen will be to react with gentleness, kindness, patience, self-control, etc.

As a youth, I heard a statement that has proven over the last 20 to 25 years to be the truest statement I've ever encountered. I wrote this statement on the inside of my main Bible. The statement is: "Either this book will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from this book." Truer words were never spoken.

I have found time and time again that when I'm regularly in the Word, I'm far from sin and feel I'm truly walking in the Spirit (as opposed to walking in the flesh). I've also realized many times in hindsight that after wrestling with sin in my life for a season, I was away from my devotional time and didn't feel like picking up my Bible.

Maybe for you, you're in the Bible regularly, but you're looking for ammo – meaning you're studying for your Sunday sermon, youth talk on Wednesday night, preparing a devotional for your small group, or looking for lyrics for a song you're writing. Often, we as leaders, are in the Word for "business", but we stop going to the Bible just to know God more and spend time hearing from Him. The challenge to all Church leaders is to read the Bible just for the pure pleasure of seeking to know the mind and heart of Christ and be transformed by the renewing of our mind. (Romans 12)

"Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; **meditate on it** day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." – Joshua 1:8

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

So... how's your time in the Word? Do you just open the Bible in sermon prep or do you regularly read it just to know God more? Is reading regularly a struggle for you?

12

STAY PURE



Staying in the Word and staying on our knees will help us with the final “stay” and that’s to stay pure. There’s nothing more precious to you and wanted by our enemy (remember the “You Have an Enemy” chapter?) than to be pure. I’m talking about your character and integrity – who you are when no one’s looking.

Like being humble, this is also easier said than done. Purity flows out of the overflow of a heart that’s in love with Jesus and walking in the Spirit daily. Purity also takes a lot of wisdom, intentionality and purpose. You must set out to be pure and put up guards in your life to help protect your purity.

I’ve mentioned before that my wife and my best friend get sent an email of what websites I go to – this is a guard in my life. You may have something similar. It’s important to protect yourself (and your kids) from the dangers of the internet.

Purity also comes from setting boundaries with co-workers. It’s not okay to flirt with your admin or that new woman on the children’s ministry staff. You must know what is appropriate and what’s not.

Part of setting up boundaries is to have some close friends that can hold you accountable, have permission to speak freely into your life and ask the tough questions. If you've ever struggled with porn or a wandering eye, you should confess that to a person of the same sex that you trust and ask them to check up on you. Meet with them from time to time to read the Bible, pray and just talk. If you've slipped up, tell them and confess out loud. Ask them to pray for you and see how you can pray for them. You'll probably find out you're not alone and you can be a source of strength for someone else in need.

Purity also means to be pure in our motives. Doing things out of our love for Christ and not to get attention. This is tough for many in ministry. We should serve because He first loved us and we desire to worship Him through our service.

Finally, when it comes to purity, I also like to point out that even if you don't struggle with purity, you may still be in danger of sin. Often times those not affected by porn or a wandering eye will start judging others that are struggling and in their judging and criticizing will sin and become men or women full of pride. Remember the Pharisee praying who said, "God I thank you that I'm not like that man, a tax collector."? (Luke 18:10-11) – Don't be that guy!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

So what about you... is purity a struggle for you? When was the last time you looked at porn? Do you wrestle with any secret addictions? Do you have people in your life that can hold you accountable? Do you have accountability software on your computer, laptop, phone and iPad?

13

PERSONAL TOUCH



We live in a digital world. Texting, IMing, Facebook pokes and tweets – it's truly a whirlwind when it comes to communicating these days. Call me old-fashioned, but I've found that a personal touch still goes a long way (yes, even in 2010 and going into 2011).

Everybody loves to receive a hand-written note thanking them for their service on your team. We're coming up on one of the busiest times of the year with Christmas. Your volunteers are going to work countless hours (your staff, too). Take the time to write out Thank You notes to each and every one of them. If you have the budget, include a gift card in the note to them. Sometimes I did Chili's gift cards for \$25. Sometimes I could only do a \$10 Starbucks card. Whatever your budget can do – make it happen.

Another thing that goes a long way in this digital world is phone calls. It seems we've lost the art of picking up the phone and checking on our team and seeing how they're doing. I used to go through my team's list of names and give them a call just to see how they were doing and if there was anything I could pray for them about. This went a long way!

One final thought I'll mention on a personal touch is to give out hugs. You wouldn't believe it, but a hug goes a long way. Now I know that some people don't like to be touched and freak out if you try to hug them. You need to be aware of body language and know if you're making someone uncomfortable, but by and large, most people like a good 'ole hug. On Wednesday night rehearsals, I greeted my team members with hugs and asked how they were doing. This is in contrast to barking "Get to your station!" or "Did you hear of the changes we made?"

I used to say stuff like that in my early days and had a volunteer say back to me, "Good evening. How are you today would have been nice to hear." Ever since then I've made it a point to not let something "business" come out of my mouth first. The person is always more important than the thing we're trying to accomplish or produce. Check on them first and then update them on the changes.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

How long has it been since you wrote a note? How long since you called a team member? Given any hugs lately? Let's surprise our team and volunteers with kindness during the busy seasons (Christmas, Easter, VBS, etc.).

14

ARE YOU AN EQUIPPER OR A DOER?



My philosophy of ministry can be summed up in one word: EQUIP. I've based my entire ministry career on this key principle: We, as shepherds and pastors, are not here to do the work of the ministry. As pastors and leaders, we are called to equip others to do the work of the ministry – thus allowing them to use their God-given spiritual gifts and find pure joy, satisfaction and peace in serving. All too often leaders rob their people of blessing by doing something solo and not allowing the people they lead to use their gifts.

As EACH ONE has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. – 1 Peter 4:10 (NKJV)

God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. – 1 Peter 4:10 (NLT)

The above passage was given to the Church (people), not just pastors. This theme of using our gifts and as leaders, encouraging others to use their gifts has been a recurring theme on my blog for years. I was changed forever 11 years ago, when I heard Ray Johnston (Senior Pastor of Bayside Church in Sacramento) speak at a conference on the Body of Christ. He burned a crystal clear image into my brain and heart of what a healthy church looks like – each person using their individual gifts to benefit and complete the whole organization.

When I'm in the interview process with a potential church that I'm considering, this is something I say up front: "I'm an equipper, not a doer." When I'm hiring a potential staff or team member, this is something I look for and anyone that's worked for me can vouch for that. I know that when churches get to a super size, there can be the occasional "specialist" – someone hired to DO something because of their unique skill and giftedness (like a designer or a video editor) – but even then, I expect them to duplicate themselves and grow their ministry area.

When I was a tech pastor, I didn't just hire a Front of House Sound Engineer, I purposely hired an Audio Coordinator. I made it clear to him that though he was gifted at sound and would be running FOH on most weekends, I expected him to grow the audio team by recruiting, training and empowering other sound engineers to be used at FOH, monitor world and in other venues throughout the campus (children, youth and special events such as weddings, funerals, concerts, etc.).

In the world of video, I always utilized volunteer video editors for various ministry projects, even when I had a paid video editor. I expect all my staff to grow their given areas of responsibility. I'm passionate about this ministry concept and principle based out of Ephesians 4.

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **to equip the saints for the work of ministry**, for building up the body of Christ... – Ephesians 4:11-12 (ESV)*

At the last church I served (Bent Tree in Dallas), I developed a Technical Arts Ministry Leadership Team (which I blogged about in the past) that was made up of a mix of volunteers and paid staff. This leadership team ran the Technical Arts Ministry. I gave away the ministry to them and worked myself out of a job. They still run the ministry to this day.

At each meeting, I would preach to them that the Technical Arts Ministry could not and would not be “Greg-centric.” I expressed my vision for each of them taking ownership of the ministry (which I’ve blogged about before) and told them that *they* were the reason that the ministry was being blessed, growing and healthy.

To me, this is Church Leadership 101 and something that growing, gifted and effective leaders grasp. In the next chapter, I’ll talk about why not all leaders grasp this and why a “doer” is a “doer.”

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

So, I’ll ask you – Are you an equipper or a doer? Do you seek to do what only you can do and responsibly delegate what can be done by others? Do you wrestle with insecurity and feel your job is in jeopardy if you don’t do everything yourself?

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WHY A HARD WORKER IS NOT ALWAYS A GOOD LEADER



I introduced this discussion of Equipper vs Doer in the last chapter. If you haven't read that yet, please go back and read that first, as it sets up what we'll be looking at next.

First let's talk about what leadership is: "**Leadership** has been described as the "process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task".
(Wikipedia)

I see leadership as both influence and a process, meaning you have to be intentional and strategic – two words I use often in my consulting and work with churches, organizations and businesses.

*"Leadership is ultimately about **creating a way for people to contribute** to making something extraordinary happen." - Alan Keith of Genentech*

Now on to the title of this blog post: “Why a hard worker is not always a good leader.” Am I against a strong and hard work ethic? Absolutely not. I have a very strong work ethic myself, but I’d rather work smart than hard. I’ve seen way too many leaders that are burned out and frustrated in their life and job and often times they are reaping what they have sewn. Andy Stanley’s book *The Principle of the Path* is a great read for more on this.

There are many hard workers across the country in churches, organizations and businesses that are working their tail off, but not experiencing health, growth, joy and the unmistakable test of being effective at what they do. If you’re flying solo in your area of ministry and playing the lone ranger, I can guarantee you that you’re not being as effective as you could be. You’re not reaching your full potential and worst yet, your organization will never be all it can be until you make some intentional and strategic changes in how you work and lead. Let’s look at this in more depth: In Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges book *Servant Leadership* they say:

*“One of the quickest ways you can tell the difference between a servant leader and a self-serving leader is how they handle feedback, because **one of the biggest fears that self-serving leaders have is to lose their position.**”*

Insecurity is at the root of many doers. Pride is at the root of other doers. Let’s look at both: First, insecurity is the downfall of many leaders from senior pastors to executive pastors to mid-level leaders and beyond. I’ve told several leaders over the years: In a small church, job security is “I’m the only one that can do this.” Think of that one sound man that runs sound every week, makes no effort to duplicate himself and thinks “They couldn’t make it without me.” Leaders in many small churches, do everything themselves because they think that secures their job. Leaders in large churches lead others to do the work of the ministry and empower those under their authority- that’s their job security.

Please understand when I say “small churches”, I’m talking about small-minded churches and churches that have stopped growing. I work with many church planters and love churches of all sizes. Church plants won’t be small forever – they’re hungry and highly evangelistic and seek to grow. I’m referring to churches that have been small for decades.

The other reason for a doer is pride. They think that they can do it better than anyone else and relish in the fantasy that they are the only one qualified to do a particular task or function. In truth, we all have a handful (maybe 3) of things that we alone can do. The majority of what you are in charge of can be given over to a team of volunteers to serve the church in that area of ministry. If you're a senior pastor, obviously you don't delegate the weekly preaching and sermon prep; however, you could put together a teaching team and start to share the pulpit with others, as many growing churches are doing.

The key is to not lead from a place of insecurity or pride – both are wrong. If you are to grow as a leader and be effective in your place of service, you must deal with these two issues head on. *Emotional Intelligence* is another great read that someone asked me to read in my 20's. There's no room for insecurity or pride in the church. This is a matter of character and knowing your identity in Christ as a Christ-follower first and leader second. In the beginning of Ken Blanchard's *Lead Like Jesus* book he says,

“Every leader must answer two critical questions:

1. *Whose am I?*
2. *Who am I?*

The first question answers “Who am I trying to please?” The second question deals with your purpose in life. My encouragement to you is to wrestle with these two questions and two sins of insecurity and pride and leave them at the foot of the cross. You'll be a better leader for it and those you lead will be glad you did. We'll continue down this path in the next chapter.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

How do you handle areas of insecurity and pride as a leader? Do you ever sense them creeping into your life and ministry? Have you answered Blanchard's two key questions? Where do you find your identity?

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THE INTENTIONAL AND STRATEGIC LEADER



One of the books that shaped me and my philosophy of ministry is *The Purpose Driven Church*. Another way of identifying or describing a purpose-driven leader is as an intentional or strategic leader. It's no accident that Jesus instructed us to be "shrewd as serpents" (Matthew 10:16). Purposeful, intentional and strategic should be words in the vocabulary and arsenal of every church leader.

I don't think what I'm about to say is black and white or cut and dry, but in my experience and travels, the biggest difference I see between small church leaders and mega-church leaders is grasping this concept of equipping others.

I know I'll take some heat for this, but most small church leaders are doers and that's why most churches in America never grow beyond 200 people. I mean really – how many people do you think one person can handle? 200 is it. Mega-church leaders know that they have to multiply themselves, understand Ephesians 4 and the equipping style of leadership and lead accordingly.

The reason I say this isn't cut and dry is because as I've blogged about before, another huge difference between small churches and fast-growing churches is fast-growing churches are externally focused – that's another issue all together, but for the purpose of this series, I want to focus on the leadership style of a doer vs an equipper and how that affects one's capacity for leadership.

Moses is a revered leader in our Bible and seen as one who accomplished much in his time, but even he had to learn this lesson from his father-in-law Jethro.

*Moses' father-in-law said, "This is no way to go about it. You'll burn out, and the people right along with you. **This is way too much for you—you can't do this alone.** Now listen to me. Let me tell you how to do this so that God will be in this with you. Be there for the people before God, but let the matters of concern be presented to God. Your job is to teach them the rules and instructions, to show them how to live, what to do. And then you need to **keep a sharp eye out for competent men**—men who fear God, men of integrity, men who are incorruptible—and **appoint them as leaders over groups** organized by the thousand, by the hundred, by fifty, and by ten. They'll be responsible for the everyday work of judging among the people. They'll bring the hard cases to you, but in the routine cases they'll be the judges. **They will share your load and that will make it easier for you. If you handle the work this way, you'll have the strength to carry out whatever God commands you, and the people in their settings will flourish also.**" Moses listened to the counsel of his father-in-law and did everything he said. – Exodus 18:17-24 (MSG)*

Thanks to Moses' father-in-law speaking the truth in love to him and opening his eyes to effective leadership, Moses learned a valuable lesson and because it was recorded in Scripture, it's there for us to learn as well. Moses became an intentional and strategic leader.

I use these words in the context of our discussion on Equipper vs Doer in order to bring clarity to our calling as pastors and in light of the Ephesians 4 passage we looked at earlier. If we are intentional about what we do and don't do and strategic about who we delegate to, empower and free up to

lead and take risks, we can experience unbelievable fruit in our ministries and the joy that only comes from doing what you were created and called to do. Not only that, we get to watch others get to use their gifts and talents for God's glory, too.

My prayer for and encouragement to you is to be intentional and strategic in your leadership. Ask yourself daily, "Is this something I alone can do? OR "Is there someone who is more passionate and gifted to do this that I can hand this off to?"

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

So, with our look at being an equipper vs a doer, where do you see yourself now? I'll ask the original question: Are you an equipper or doer? And this chapter's question: Are you intentional and strategic as a leader?

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NOBODY IS IRREPLACEABLE



It was recently announced that Tiger Woods will return to the PGA for the Masters. I love to watch Tiger play golf, so I'm happy, but please hear me: the PGA was around long before Tiger and the PGA will go on long after Tiger. No one is irreplaceable.

This principle applies to church leadership as well. I don't care how big the name, how great the personality or how gifted the communicator – all pastors are replaceable. Rick Warren could leave Saddleback and Saddleback would go on. Craig Groeschel could leave LifeChurch.tv and it would go on. Andy Stanley could leave North Point and it would go on. You get the picture.

This is a sign of good leadership and a church (local Body of Christ) that is not personality-driven and ego-centric. There are some churches (I'm not going to name them – that's not the point of this) that would crumble if something happened to their senior pastor. That is a shame and a sign of poor leadership.

When I led the technical arts ministry at Bent Tree, I created and led a Technical Arts Leadership Team comprised mostly of volunteers.

In our meetings I would stress to them the importance of them taking ownership in the ministry. I've blogged about that several times on my blog. I can distinctly remember saying to my leadership team numerous times that the ministry could not be "Greg-centric". Now that I'm no longer at Bent Tree, this team (which was never built around me) continues to lead the ministry and make Sunday happen each week, as well as see that the team members are cared for.

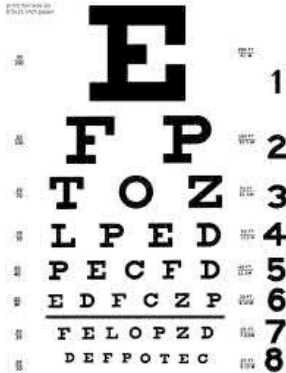
Bent Tree was a great church before I came and they're a great church without me. That's the whole point. Nobody's irreplaceable. I want to encourage you to lead in such a way that if something happened to you or God called you somewhere else, your current church would continue to thrive without you.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

How healthy is your church's culture? Does your pastor, staff and yourself act, work and lead as though they know they are replaceable? How is your church's leadership model and structure set up? If you died tomorrow, would your ministry crumble? Are you aware of any personality-driven or ego-driven ministries? What have you learned from them?

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THE PAIN OF FOLLOWING A LEADER WITH NO VISION



Yesterday I took my son to the eye doctor because he had been complaining of having trouble reading things up close. He's getting reading glasses to wear just for homework and reading and will hopefully get better with time. As I sat in the room with him and watched them test his vision, I had a very interesting experience.

As they asked my son to read a chart up close, he began to mess up and couldn't focus on the letters. I sat there feeling helpless, uncomfortable, grieving and sincerely wishing he could do better. I left the doctor, dropped him back off at school and couldn't shake the feeling.

I started thinking about vision as it relates to leadership and what it must be like for people in a church where the leader lacks vision and there's nothing compelling about their mission. I wonder if they feel helpless, uncomfortable, if they grieve and sincerely wish the leader would make a call and lead them. The Bible says:

Where there is no vision [no redemptive revelation of God],
the people perish; - *Proverbs 29:18* (Amplified Bible)

I started thinking about that word *perish*. One of the definitions of *perish* is

“to pass away or disappear” – I wonder if people in churches without vision die a slow death. I wonder how long they stick around feeling helpless, uncomfortable and grieving for their leader, their church and their community.

Yes, there are some people that quickly pick up on the lack of vision and leave the church to find another more vibrant church, but how many people keep coming back week after week secretly hoping things will get better? Hoping and praying that the pastor will get a word from God, lead with passion, conviction and purpose. I wonder how many gifted, capable, passionate lay leaders are sitting untapped in congregations around the country. I wonder.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

Do the people of your church know your vision? Has there been a vision leak? Have you read Andy Stanley’s book *Visioneering*? What truths can you gain from that book that can apply to your ministry?

CONCLUSION

The following chapters were excerpts from my blog (GregAtkinson.com). They were written over the course of a couple of years and put together in book form. I do not claim to have covered even half of what church leaders need to know. I simply shared the thoughts that had come to my mind and I had blogged about either on my blog and/or ChurchLeaders.com.

I welcome you to email me anytime at greg@gregatkinson.com and share your thoughts, insights and ideas for future chapters and books. I stopped this book at 18 chapters so it wouldn't get too long. I'm sure there are more lessons to write about and I plan to in the future. Look for Church Leadership 201 in the near future. May God bless you as you serve His Church.

Greg Atkinson has been writing, speaking and training Church leaders since 2000. In late 2003, Greg launched MultisensoryWorship.com (mSw) – a website geared to encourage, network, resource, and equip Christian pastors, media ministers, artists and worship leaders – after having served the previous 11 years as a worship pastor himself in the Carolinas and Washington DC.

Greg has a degree in church music with a minor in religion and has done graduate work in worship, leadership, communication and church planting. He helped create, develop and lead WorshipHouse Media, while serving as Director there until the summer of 2006.

Greg has spoken at numerous conferences has written for various magazines, newsletters, e-zines, blogs. Greg is a contributor to Pastors.com, ChurchLeaders.com and Leadership Network.

Greg produced ARC's online church planter training and as he has time travels the country as a secret shopper/mystery worshiper for mega-churches. You can find out more about that ministry here: www.worshipimpressions.com. Greg is a sought-after consultant – specializing in areas such as social media, innovation, worship, strategy, technology, worship, creative communication, and engaging the senses in corporate worship. Greg has a special passion for church plants and has served as a coach, consultant and assessor of potential and existing church planters. Greg has worked with churches of all stages and sizes including some of the largest and fastest-growing churches in the US, as well as organizations such as Josh McDowell Ministries.

Greg started a social media marketing company called **GTK Solutions** – named after his three kids (Grace, Tommy and Katie). GTK Solutions worked with businesses in the area of social media and increasing their business, growing and interacting with customers and creating and maintaining their online presence and brand.

Greg is now the **Campus Pastor at Forest Park Carthage** (a multi-site church in southwest Missouri) and lives with his wife and their three children in Carthage, Missouri. Greg can be reached at greg@gregatkinson.com.

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