



# The McIntosh

## Church Growth Network

Ministry Insights for Church Leaders

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Volume 16 Issue 10

October 2004

### Parable of the Wagon, Part 2

**Internal mentoring** is investing time with friends or associates within the same denominational system or fellowship of churches who are mutually perceived as peers and who agree to form a lateral relationship.

One of the most encouraging trends today is the realization that pastoral peer networks are the most cost-effective means to revitalize congregations. In no other environment is a peer able to experience more safety, honesty, and encouragement as well as receiving such effective team building skills. By working within a single denomination, and within a geographical area that does not exceed a two hour drive, members are able to concentrate on the particular issues with denominational peers who all come from a similar theological tradition.

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Breakthrough occurs when pastors have the courage to share their own pain or confusion, and then experience genuine care and life-changing counsel from their peers. From this point forward, no one is asking how many more sessions they must attend, or what subjects we will be covering during the next several months. Instead, members realize this is a biblical umbilical chord. They look forward to contributing and receiving nourishment from peers in a transformational missional community.

**External mentoring** is investing time with friends or associates from different denominational systems and often from different vocational specialties, who agree to form a lateral relationship.

Many pastors feel the need to talk to another trusted friend who is not enmeshed in the culture or politics of the same denomination. They want someone who can function as a neutral sounding board. Pastors are often willing to travel to another part of the country just to be with a friend who can understand them, provide another perspective, and offer honest feedback.

External mentors invest time with friends or associates from different denominational systems and often from different vocational specialties, who agree to form a lateral relationship.

No longer are pastors able to justify and defend their isolation from one another. The unity described in John 17 is gradually becoming a priority. Instead of being perceived by an increasingly skeptic public as irrelevant, pastors are covenanting and banding together for mutual support and discussions of how to become a transforming, regional force.

In order to maximize personal growth, it is desirable that every leader try to manage some relationships from all four categories on a regular basis. The dangers of over committing can be minimized by efficiently managing a personal mentoring system.

## Mentoring Skills

There is one essential skill that must be mastered before a personal mentoring system can produce significant results. This skill is the way an individual enters and exits mentoring relationships. Most persons have too few relationships, most relationships last too long, and most results are not nearly as satisfactory as they could be.

The reason for each of these problems is simply a lack of training. We tend to settle for whatever relationships come our way. We do not find it easy either to begin a new relationship or to terminate one that is no longer serving a useful purpose. Some relationships, such as with God, with our spouses, and with our immediate family members, are meant to be permanent. Almost all other relationships are casual, occasional, or short term; a few others are lifetime. In most mentoring relationships, there comes a point of diminishing returns for commitments that last beyond two years.

In order to improve the quality of our mentoring relationships, we need to be more intentional in how we arrange for and follow through on them. We must first determine how many relationships are needed in each category. Second, we should make a list of prospective persons. Third, we will need to decide how best to approach each person. Once a person agrees to begin a mentoring relationship, several other questions should be answered. For example, how often should we meet, where should we meet, what basic areas should we include, and when should we evaluate the progress we are making?

## Mentoring God's Gifted People

One of the most proven approaches to overcoming the prevailing inertia in congregations is to identify and release the gifts of team members. In fact, of all the strategies needed to produce consistent, balanced and healthy growth, none creates more satisfaction and is more easily transferable than a process that identifies giftedness, and then mentors people to place themselves within the Body of Christ accordingly.

What all of the effective "mobilization" strategies have in common is a preference for persons being motivated by servanthood and suitability rather than duty or duress. The Bible refers to spiritual gifts in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and 1 Peter 4. Ephesians 4 also speaks of people as gifts to the church, but such gifted people may also have a corresponding spiritual gift that empowers their leadership.

The scriptural notion of giftedness is the proper centerpiece for all mentoring strategies. Related human resources information, such as understanding personality and temperament, complements the basic principles of giftedness and underscores the concept of suitability. The Bible addresses the universal question of how to know God's will. Every human being has a vacuum that can only be filled with Christ. Their fulfillment in Christ cannot be ultimately experienced until they find the place of service that has been divinely created for them. This core conviction can be an indispensable motivational ingredient for mentoring relationships.

### Consider:

What it would be like if your church were able to double or triple the amount of effective mentoring over a period of several years?

What kind of impact would this have on the quantity and quality of leadership development?

What it would be like if your church were able to double or triple the percentage of persons who have been mobilized according to servanthood and suitability rather than duty or duress?

What kind of impact would this have in reducing burnout and in increasing ministry effectiveness?

Excerpted from a forthcoming book,  
*Lifegiving Systems: How to Energize Your Church  
for Robust Ministry*  
by R. Daniel Reeves and Gary L McIntosh.