



The McIntosh

Church Growth Network

Ministry Insights for Church Leaders

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Volume 16 Issue 9

September 2004

Parable of the Wagon, Part 1

Three horses were having a conversation in a wagon. The first horse said, "We're not moving!" The second horse replied, "Yes, that's true. I wonder why?" The third horse, who was obviously the most insightful, asked, "Do you suppose it is because there are no other horses out in front pulling?"

There is a direct correlation between the number of horses that are sitting in the wagon, going for a ride, and the number of horses out in front pulling (and leading the way). Indeed, one of the most stubborn and elusive challenges in ministry today is how to get lay people out of the wagon and involved in front line ministry.

The challenge is increasingly difficult in this transitional early millennium period when almost all family members work and have multiple distractions and demands on their time. Consequently, due to fatigue or a preoccupation with their own needs, people often prefer to consume rather than become involved in ministry.

Spectatorship, like a gravitational force, holds back vibrant institutional and personal growth and limits ministry effectiveness. For their own true happiness, as well as for the missional cause to which all Christians are called, we need to help people find their way out of the wagon to join the team pulling the wagon.

Leadership development cannot be sustained in local congregations without accountability and mentoring relationships. A proliferation of mentoring research has occurred since 1990.

Because of this impressive amount of new information, a composite thesis may now be presented. Effectiveness in leadership is largely due to the quantity and quality of mentoring relationships.

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No area has received greater attention in recent years than church leadership development. Yet despite the record number of books and tapes being produced, too few pastoral and lay leaders are actually being produced.

One of the most important areas that must be addressed in coaching leadership teams is the subject of how to develop, nurture and preserve pastoral and lay leadership.

Levels of Mentoring

Robert "Bobby" Clinton describes four essential types of mentoring: upward, downward, internal, and external. Of these four, *upward mentoring* is the most difficult type of relationship to find. *Upward mentors are those you perceive to be ahead of you in age, experience, size of congregation or degree of personal effectiveness.*

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Of course, those who are perceived as having the most to contribute are invariably the leaders in shortest supply. In order to compensate for this reality, emerging millennial leaders must learn the skill set of taking the initiative to seek and secure upward mentors.

Most pastors do not come equipped naturally with either the desire to initiate a relationship of this kind, or the skill set necessary to follow through on such a desire with effectiveness. For the majority of pastors, such a request would appear to be presumptive. I have heard some justify their inaction with careful reasoning: "If I were to ask for a commitment of this kind, it might appear as an unreasonable demand. Pastor Smith is a busy person. I need to respect his privacy. Besides, the risk of rejection is too high for me to take the chance."

For men born before 1965, this challenge can be overwhelming. They often relate it to what it was like approaching a female classmate as a potential date. Awkwardness and rejection flood their minds. Fortunately, during the current generation the challenge is not as daunting, because of the predominant tendency for young men to "hang out" regularly with other young men and young women. Much of the awkwardness is minimized because genuine relationships are developed in a much more natural environment than in the last two generations.

In light of the Great Commission, such logical fallacies cannot of course be ignored. Most pastors require some simple coaching at this point. "Sure it might be somewhat stretching and uncomfortable to make a list of potential upward mentors and begin contacting them, but let me help you think it through." Usually, all that is required is some time to think about which individuals would make the most ideal upward mentor. Then it is often helpful to think through possible approaches by phone or email. Creativity is also necessary to think of ways to overcome the realities of geographical distance or frequency of meetings. With so much at stake, one can at an appropriate time also raise the strategic question, "What are the costs to your ministry of not making upward mentoring a priority?"

Downward mentoring is investing time in developing those who perceive you as ahead of them in age, experience, size of congregation or degree of personal effectiveness. But, for the best of leaders, this type of mentoring often produces the opposite challenge. What can be done to develop new leaders from those who gravitate towards you?

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Many pastors, due to the sheer demand of limited time, discover the advantages to mentoring prospective leaders in groups or in teams, rather than one-on-one. Weekly meetings with the staff team are quite common. Much less intuitive is the notion that pouring one's life into a few over the long haul generates more fruitfulness with much less risk of burnout. However, even a quick overview of the ministry of Jesus demonstrates that he trained the twelve disciples primarily as a group, and only rarely do we find his conversing with people alone. The apostle Paul got this point across to Timothy, with his advice to find a few faithful men and women who can in turn find a few faithful men and women (II Tim. 2:2).

Somehow Paul's advice does not seem to fit the hectic schedules of today's typical senior pastor. Instead, we often allow survival instincts to determine our scheduling patterns. We eliminate personal appointments whenever it can be justified, and we try to gather all of our leaders into one single meeting each month.

Unfortunately, it has taken us a long time, and an enormous amount of pain in the form of epidemic pastoral burnout, to learn that Paul's advice is just as relevant today as it was in the first century. The jury is no longer out on this question. How many more examples do we need? (Continued next issue)

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