

7 Paradigms Often Necessary for Church Growth

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I speak with churches often who want to grow and they [contact](#) me wanting for suggestions. In my experience, there are often paradigms needed for church growth.

I've learned it's seldom a vision problem. The church actually has the clearest and best defined vision of anyone. We are to "Go and make disciples".

Sometimes we fail to do those things which accomplish the vision. For example, if all the ministries are focused on people already inside the church – there won't likely be a lot of growth. Or it could be the church isn't making genuine disciples. People are observers more than participants. They aren't being trained to take their faith into their everyday life – sharing Christ with their neighbors, co-workers and friends.

Go and make disciples really is the plan for church growth.

To be clear, God grows the church. It's not about us. But God uses people to do His work. (Remember how Jesus "sent" the disciples?)

With the best visions, however, if you want to have a culture susceptible and open to growth then there are some common paradigms necessary for church growth. You have to think certain ways in order to reach a desired vision. In most every situation, an absence of certain actions or mindsets on the part of leaders keeps the church from moving forward.

7 paradigms often needed for church growth:

Lead with leaders

Of course you need followers too, but most people are looking for leadership, especially about things about which they don't know. In any group you'll have a few who are ready to move forward with the changes needed and a few who are opposed to any change you bring. The rest of the people are looking for leadership. Lead with those who are ready to move in a positive direction.

Do you have the "right people on the bus"? Are you leading with people who want the church to grow or just want things like they want things (or like things have always been)? Do you have creative people who would want church growth sitting on the sidelines because they've never been asked to get involved? (We recently did a skills survey of our church.)

I realize you may not be able to change the church's leadership, but part of your leadership may be leading through a maze of bad leadership and empowering people who want to move things forward. The best leaders (and "next season" leaders) often have to be recruited.

Prioritize your time

You can't do everything or be everywhere. Let me say it again. **You can't do everything or be everywhere.** This doesn't ignore the expectation placed on you as a leader, but it does recognize your limitations. By the way, the quickest way to burnout and ineffectiveness is to ignore this one.

Are you spending your best energy on things which matter most in helping the church "go and make disciples"? Read Ephesians 5:16. (And protecting your family time may be one place you need to better prioritize so you are as healthy a leader as you can be.)

Stop wasting energy

This one is similar, but when something is working put fuel into it. Put all cylinders on go.

Momentum feeds momentum. Yes, in keeping the previous one this means you'll have to ignore a few things to do the very best things. You have to learn the value of saying no to things which simply waste energy and time. Usually the most energy needs to be in a few key places at a time. Never fail to capitalize on those important moments in time.

What is simply taking too much time and effort for too few results? There are often programs and activities that, while we like them, they do very little to get us closer to achieving our vision. As leaders we have to “lead” people to better realities than this.

Embrace change

You have to live in the tension of change if you want to experience growth. Change is never popular with everyone, but when you resist it, you are resisting the opportunity to grow. More of the same may be comfortable, but it seldom produces the excitement necessary for growth.

What is a change you know you need to lead people to make, but you’ve been afraid to walk by faith into it? (Read Nehemiah again – or Acts 10. Think about how scared Peter must have been to walk into new territory.)

Make hard decisions

Don’t be naive. Change may bring momentum – and hopefully growth, but as exciting as that can be not everyone will be excited about it. If you are going to achieve the vision you’ll have to be willing to stand the test of time. It won’t be easy. With some decisions you make you’ll be choosing who buys into the vision and who doesn’t – even who sits in the pews the next week.

Be willing to make the hard decisions and you’ll keep the church open to idea of growth. Leadership is about hard decisions. You’ve never been this way before and the people you are trying to lead haven’t been either. That’s scary.

Do you have people in your life you can share the pain of leadership with to help you navigate the hard decisions?

Build healthy teams

You can’t do it alone. Fact is, you may be able to “manage” a church, which is not growing – until the money runs out. You can control people who don’t think for themselves. But if you want to grow, especially grow long-term, you’ll need to surround yourself with healthy people who build a healthy team environment – and let other people share leadership.

Have you truly empowered people around you to live out their individual passion and calling towards achieving the vision? Are you an empowering leader or a controlling one? Again, Jesus sent the disciples out on their own. (With the Spirit of God, of course.)

Refuel often

I find the more we are growing and the more change is occurring, the more I have to get away and gain perspective. Renew. Recharge. Sometimes even re-engage. I can't lead for growth if I'm drowning in the demands of the present.

How close are you running towards empty these days? Sometimes you have to step away even when it makes no sense to do so simply so you can take the next "mountain" in front of you. Protecting your soul is good stewardship in leadership and it's a God-given (Sabbath) command.

Let me try to be clear again. By no means am I attempting to take God's presence out of church growth. Ultimately church growth, as is every aspect of spiritual growth, is from the hand of God. But two things appear clear to me in the Bible. I believe God gives us a mind to be creative and use, but I also believe there are even Biblical principles at work here. God uses His people to do His work. And God wants His church to penetrate culture with the hope of the Gospel. I simply believe He uses both of those together.

In a day of increasing darkness, we need to be smarter church leaders. We need growing churches.

I don't know believe this is an exclusive list, but I hope these paradigms for church growth are a good start.