

7 Commonalities in Pastors Who Excel at Church Revitalization

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Some pastors excel in church revitalization better than others. Nothing wrong with that. The ones that do seem to have certain commonalities.

I am somewhat unique to have done multiples church revitalization efforts as pastor, as well as a couple of successful church plants.

Yet, even more, I've worked with hundreds of pastors in both efforts. Along the way, I've tried to learn some things and pass them along here.

One thing I've learned is there are some common traits among pastors who can successfully revitalize an established church. I think they are important things to know; before someone tries it.

7 commonalities in pastors who excel at church revitalization:

Calling

It should go without saying, but I don't recommend church revitalization to anyone unless they have a clear calling from God. I believe God often gives tremendous latitude in allowing us to choose where we serve, but church revitalization appears to be a unique calling – similar to church planting – and one I'd be almost certain God has called you to do. In my experience, it's easier to plant a church. Starting from scratch is usually easier than trying to revive an established church, which has

been in decline. (Granted, this is just my opinion, but it's based on experience.) And we need lots of church plants.

I don't have statistics to back it up, but there has to be more Kingdom money in established, but declining churches than the total invested in recent years in church planting. We need church revitalization – if for no other reason to be good stewards of Kingdom resources, but make sure you're called to do it.

Supportive spouse

As in church planting – or any ministry – if you're married, the spouse plays a huge role. Yet, to be honest, in church revitalization, Cheryl's part was one of the hardest parts for me personally. I have the greatest pastor's wife. She genuinely loves people.

There were days, however, when people with no filter chose my wife as a punching bag for their frustration with me. In the early days, it happened almost every time we announced a change. (I made it very clear that was not an acceptable response, and it got better with time, but it happened.)

That never happened in church planting. It might not happen as often if we had left everything alone and didn't try to revitalize. The bottom line though is Cheryl and I felt we were being called to this. In fact, she sensed it before I did. (She almost always does when it comes to matters of faith.)

Love of history and tradition

The key here is you're in revitalization. It's not demolition. You're leading a church to rediscover their past. If they don't have a past worth rediscovering then demolition might be a better option. Give up and go plant a church. But revitalization will involve celebrating some of the great moments from history. Along the way there will be traditions worth maintaining. They are culture – DNA – and they work towards the mission. They just need new energy behind them. Rediscover. Don't reinvent.

Entrepreneurial spirit

I've heard those who love the experience of everything new say they'd get bored in revitalization. Not! In addition to loving what's old, it helps greatly to love all things new. This attribute and the last one are rare as a combination. It's unusual to love history and tradition and have an entrepreneurial spirit. You can't leave things exactly as you found them and expect the church to revive. Revitalization involves change.

In reality, the heart of a planter, if they can live with the other attributes needed, works well in church revitalization.

Patience

It won't be easy and you will not be able to move as fast as you can in church planting. The delicate balance between preserving DNA, while encouraging change, will be challenging at times. You'll live in the tension of fixing things quickly and fixing things right. To be successful, you'll need to honor the past while you push towards the future.

This takes patience. (Frankly you'll need more some days than you will others.)

Visionary

A church revitalization pastor receives a call and then grasps a God-given vision for what could be. It's a strong enough vision to provide the tenacity to see it to fruition. You have to be able to cast vision in a powerful enough way people are willing to follow.

Resilience

Dictionary.com defines resilience as "*the power or ability to return to the original position after being stretched.*" No, doubt you'll be stretched as a church revitalizing pastor. This also requires perseverance. Dictionary.com defines perseverance as "*steady persistence in a course of action*". Yes, this too. You'll have set backs. There will be days you think you're making progress only to realize people are upset about the color of the new carpet. Through it all, you'll have to keep going to be successful. If God called you to it then you will be.

My goal is not to scare any one from church revitalization. Quite the contrary. We need some who will take up the calling. My goal is for you to be prepared – and ultimately – to be successful by sharing these commonalities I’ve observed in church revitalization. To the glory of God.