

Seven Key Paradigm Shifts

THE CURRENT LEADER DEVELOPMENT CRISIS

For the last 20-30 years, there has been a great deal of focus around the world on evangelism and church planting.

Some of the contributing reasons for this have been:

- The sovereign outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- The Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelization (1974).
- Amsterdam '83 (and since): Billy Graham's International Conference for Itinerant Evangelists.
- The AD2000 Movement: "A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person by AD 2000."
- Advances in research creating widely-used resources especially focusing on Unreached People Groups, such as *The World Christian Database* and *Joshua Project*.
- Proliferation of "world evangelism plans" – there have been over 1000 new ones in 30 years!
- Multiple major prayer initiatives focusing on evangelism.
- Considerable missions mobilization of local churches, especially focusing on Unreached People Groups.
- The rise of dynamic evangelism efforts from the Majority World.

The fruit of this has been profound:

- Tens of thousands of people are coming to Christ *each day* around the world.
- Thousands of new churches are planted *every week*.

We should thank God for this spectacular growth!

However, there has not been corresponding attention given to *leader development* during this time. Consequently, today we have a deficit of Christian leaders in the existing churches, with new churches being planted all the time! *An increasing deficit!*

In addition to this crisis of *quantity* of new leaders, we also face a crisis of *quality* of existing leaders.

Clearly, our traditional methods of leader development simply have not delivered either the quantity or quality of leaders that today's churches need.

It would be careless and irresponsible for us to simply rejoice in the great harvest of souls that is happening today in many parts of the world, without addressing the issue of leader development. We should remember the Welsh Revival of 1904-06.

During the Welsh Revival, tens of thousands of people came to Christ, the churches were filled with people praising God and entire towns were transformed. Many bars were emptied. Men and women who used to spend their money on getting drunk were now giving it to help their churches, buying clothes and food for their families.

Stealing and other offences diminished so that, more than once, a magistrate came to court and found there were no cases for him to deal with! Men, whose language had been filthy before, learned to talk purely. It was observed that not only did the coal miners put in a better day's work, but also that the pit ponies turned disobedient! The ponies were so used to being cursed and sworn at that they simply didn't understand when orders were given in kind, clean words! The dark tunnels underground in the mines echoed with the sounds of prayer and hymns, instead of foul language, nasty jokes and gossip. People, who had been careless about paying their bills or debts, paid all they owed. Others forgot their quarrels and forgave one another. Much of the nation of Wales was shaken by God's mighty power, and, from this revival, many other nations were impacted.

However, today, at the start of the 21st century, Wales is one of the most secular countries in Europe – a mere 100 years later!

We can learn from this, and from other historical revivals, that unless there are healthy leaders who are capable of leading God's people to maturity, within a generation or two much of the harvest will be lost!

We are in a crisis of leader development. Our traditional methods of leader development have not delivered either the quantity or quality of leaders that we need, and unless this is addressed, in a generation or two much of today's glorious harvest will be lost.

We need a new paradigm of leader development. It's time for some "lateral" thinking!

VERTICAL AND LATERAL THINKING

Vertical thinking begins with a single concept and then proceeds with that concept until a solution is reached. Lateral ("sideways") thinking refers to thinking that generates alternative ways of seeing a problem before seeking a solution.

Vertical thinking is like digging a hole deeper and bigger, to make it a better hole. But if the hole is in the wrong place, then no amount of improvement is going to put it in the right place. No matter how obvious this may seem to every digger, it is still easier to go on digging in the same place than to start all over again in a new place. Vertical thinking is digging the same hole deeper; lateral thinking is trying again somewhere else.

A missionary friend of ours in Central America watched this played out quite literally. After spending a long time stubbornly digging a deeper and deeper hole in one location trying to find water (vertical thinking), the well-diggers finally moved to *another spot* and struck water almost immediately (lateral thinking).

THE PRINTING PRESS – A NEW PARADIGM

From AD 450 to 1450, Bibles were all hand-written manuscripts (“manuscript” comes from the Latin for “handwritten”), the heritage of monks. From the eleventh century, each abbey and monastery had its own “Scriptorium,” where work was done copying or creating, decorating or binding. A single manuscript would take weeks, with a monk hand-copying the manuscript and working nine hours a day.

Imagine this today in the face of the church growth we’re experiencing – tens of thousands of new Bibles are needed every day!

In the time of the monks, what would have been a vertical-thinking response to the crisis of rapid church growth? Employ more monks! Write faster! Of course, this would never have worked. They needed a new paradigm.

Enter Gutenberg, a lateral thinker! Johannes Gutenberg took two previously unconnected ideas: the wine press and the coin punch. The purpose of the coin punch was to leave an image on a small area such as a gold coin. The function of the wine press was, and still is, to apply force over a large area to squeeze the juice out of grapes. Gutenberg took many coin punches and put them under the force of the wine press so that they left their image on paper. The resulting combination was the printing press and movable type (ca. 1450). This began a revolution!

This relates directly to our current leadership crisis around the world. We cannot keep building leaders the same way while merely trying to do it faster and on a larger scale. More of the same will not do! *We need to transform the way leaders are built.* We need a new paradigm.

We need a new paradigm of leader development. We cannot keep building leaders the same way while merely trying to do it faster and on a larger scale. More of the same will not do! *We need to transform the way leaders are built.* We need a new paradigm.

SEVEN KEY PARADIGM SHIFTS

There are seven key paradigm shifts that address the current crises of leader quantity and quality.

1. A new goal.

Traditionally, our primary goal has been academic capacity. This is reflected in the central role of the academic degree in determining a leader’s ministry qualification.

In the new paradigm, we focus intentionally on *building the whole person*. Of course, the healthy Christian leader needs strong biblical knowledge, but, by itself, this is not sufficient. The clear goal of leader development must be the development of the whole person – spiritual life, relational capacity, marriage, character and vision, as well as ministry knowledge and competencies. Our goal is

not mere information, but transformation! We must build *healthy* leaders.

2. A new process.

If we shift our goal from academics to building the whole person, it is immediately apparent that we need a new process. A purely academic process (desks, lectures, books and exams) will not effectively build spiritual life, character and practical ministry capacity. Many seminaries and Bible schools have recognized this and are complementing their classroom agendas (information) with a variety of intentional spiritual, relational and experiential dynamics (transformation).

In the new paradigm, we implement a holistic process that gives strong and balanced attention to four dynamics:

- *Spiritual.* Experiential union with Christ is the center of a truly transformational process. We must bring our emerging leaders to God!
- *Relational.* Emerging leaders need more than lecturers; they need daily relationships with mature leaders, role models, examples, spiritual mothers and fathers – in the context of normal daily life and ministry. In the encouragement, support, challenge, teaching, discipline and accountability of these relationships, character is built, marriages are strengthened and spiritual life is nurtured.
- *Experiential.* Leaders learn by doing and not only by listening to lectures. They are transformed through the fires of suffering and pressure, and are stretched by challenging assignments.
- *Instructional.* The teaching of the Word of God – in an engaging way, and woven into the ongoing daily realities of life, family and ministry – is central to healthy leader development.

All four of these dynamics will be strongly present in an effective leader development process.

3. A new design.

Traditionally, we have rarely given much thought to leader development design; we have simply perpetuated tradition, teaching as we were taught. Jesus, however, designed an extraordinary collage of diverse learning experiences for His emerging leaders.

In the new paradigm, we learn how to design learning experiences as Jesus did. Leader development is a rather chaotic, complex and multifaceted experiential collage of diverse people, relationships, influences, assignments, tasks, responsibilities, duties, deadlines, opportunities, pressures, crises, blessings, sufferings, rejections, successes, mistakes, etc., that all work together to

build the emerging leader. Thus, an effective leader development process is not a neat series of courses but a fiery immersion in real-life, real-time experiences, reflecting the complicated and fundamentally difficult nature of Christian leadership, bringing deep heart issues to the surface to be dealt with, and compelling the participant to look utterly to God for success.

4. Leaders building leaders.

Jesus came to the earth to do three things:

- To die on the cross for the sins of humanity.
- To proclaim the Kingdom of God and reveal the Father, through His words and works.
- To build a team of emerging leaders.

And that's all He did! So we know that building leaders is one of the central things that healthy leaders do.

Thankfully, we do not have to die on the cross for humanity's sins, since Jesus has accomplished that once and for all. We must, however, embrace the other two responsibilities. While we have focused on proclaiming the Kingdom and revealing the Father – that is, doing the “ministry stuff” – we have rarely, however, embraced personal and systematic responsibility for building leaders. Instead, we have sent our emerging leaders off to the “experts” in the remote academic institutions, hoping that they would do it for us. We have been too busy with leadership to build leaders!

We need to reconnect the two – leaders do ministry work *and* they build leaders at the same time. In the new paradigm, leaders embrace personal responsibility for leader development as a core part of what it means to be a leader. This shift alone has the potential to address both issues of *quality* (as mature leaders impart the vision, passion, courage and strategic perspectives of leadership) and *quantity* (as every leader takes personal responsibility to build leaders).

5. Churches building leaders.

Biblically, the primary unit of leader development is the local church or cluster of churches. It is not the disconnected academic institution.

In the new paradigm, just as leaders personally embrace their God-given responsibility to build leaders, so local churches embrace their God-given responsibility to build their own sons and daughters. This shift also has the potential to address both crises of *quality* and *quantity*. Some of the benefits are:

- **Multiplication.** The inherent limitations of the institutional approach will be lifted, the church-based approach providing a model that can be multiplied virtually endlessly with

every local church or cluster of churches providing a learning environment for their emerging leaders. If every local church would build only one or two new leaders, the quantity crisis would be over!

- **Holistic development.** The learning process becomes considerably more effective since the local church provides the spiritual, relational and practical context for the development of the whole person.
- **The right people receive training.** The emerging and existing leaders who need training the most are those who are already engaged in ministry and cannot leave their work for years at a time to go and study in a distant institution. In the traditional approach, we consistently train the wrong people.
- **Flexibility.** When it comes to leader development, “one size” does not fit all. Around the world, leaders from a vast variety of cultures, backgrounds, experiences, education levels, etc., need to be built. Our approaches must be flexible and customizable. In addition, in many countries, the environment is rapidly changing around the church, again requiring flexibility in our approaches to leader development.
- **Self-support.** The local church provides the financial support for the learning process, thus maintaining both responsibility for and control of the development of its own emerging leaders. To be truly self-governing, the community must be self-supporting.
- **Security in restricted countries.** In restricted countries, educational institutions are often not viable due to their size, visibility and the ease with which they can be closed down. Church-based learning communities, on the other hand, can be small, easily-hidden and pervasive.
- **Ongoing, lifelong leader development.** The training is not limited to a certain period of time, but continues throughout the emerging leaders' lives. Leaders are built over lifetimes!
- **Effective evaluation.** Members of the local community who know the emerging leader and who work with him on a daily basis are the very best ones to help him both establish goals for his development and evaluate his growth toward those goals.

6. Church planting through leader development.

Jesus' vision was for hundreds of thousands of churches around the world in every people group. He did not, however, personally plant any! Instead, He built leaders and those leaders then turned the world upside down. We have done it the other way around, by multiplying evangelistic efforts and planting many churches and then trying to address the need for leaders.

In the new paradigm, healthy leader development is raised to the same level of priority and focus as church planting. This is the only way we will plant and grow sustainable churches.

7. The centrality of the Person of Jesus Christ in Christian leadership.

For many years, Christian leadership training consisted essentially of courses related to biblical knowledge – Old Testament Survey, New Testament Survey, Systematic Theology, Biblical Ethics, Church History, etc. Of course, this did not prepare the students very well for the practical demands of life and ministry. To meet this need, new and more practical approaches to leader development have grown in popularity, often consisting of business models of leadership or motivational, “success” anecdotes of basketball coaches, football stars and wealthy businesspeople.

However, when Jesus described His own leadership, His entire focus was on His inner union with the Father:

The Jews were amazed and asked, “How did this man get such learning without having studied?” Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me...” (John 7:15-16; cf. Acts 4:13)

I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence... (I have) told you the truth that I heard from God... (John 8:38-40)

...the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. (John 5:19)

...it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. (John 14:10)

In the new paradigm, union with Christ, the cross, suffering, holiness and dependency on the Holy Spirit are at the center of all our leader development. The Person of Jesus Christ is the Beginning and the End of all Christian leadership and leader development.

Abide in me, and I will abide in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must abide in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man abides in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:4-5)

SUMMARY

In summary, these are the seven key paradigm shifts to transform the way leaders are built:

1. **A new goal** – the healthy Christian leader, not just academic achievement.
2. **A new process** – holistic development, transformation and not just information.
3. **Intentional design** – a collage of diverse learning experiences, not simply perpetuating traditional courses while teaching (lecturing) as we were taught.
4. **Leaders build leaders** – leaders taking personal responsibility for leader development, rather than only fulfilling ministry responsibilities themselves while delegating leader development to others.
5. **Churches build leaders** – the primary unit of leader development is the local church or cluster of churches, and not a disconnected academic institution.
6. **Church planting through leader development** – the emphasis on building leaders must be raised to the same level of priority and focus as evangelism and church planting if we are to plant and grow sustainable churches.
7. **The centrality of the Person of Jesus Christ in Christian leadership.** Union with Christ, the cross, suffering, holiness and dependency on the Holy Spirit (John 15:4-5) must be at the center of all our leader development. The Person of Jesus Christ is the Beginning and the End of all Christian leadership and leader development.

This is how we can build Christian leaders who will, once again, turn the world upside down!

FURTHER INFORMATION

For our complete models, please see: *Healthy Leaders: SpiritBuilt Leadership #2* and *Building Leaders: SpiritBuilt Leadership #4* by Malcolm Webber.



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