

## CHURCH TRANSFORMATION – MAKING IT WORK

### INTRODUCTION

Dr. John Kotter, noted writer on leadership, change, and transition wrote in the Harvard Business Review that often transformation in any organisation does not work. He listed eight reasons why that is so. Paul Borden took those eight reasons, turned them around, and used them to write this paper as an outline of what will make transformation work. He has written this for the local church context and will be discussing what it takes to lead a congregation from organisational dysfunction to organisational health. The assumption being that healthy congregations are growing congregations. Not all growing congregations are healthy, however, healthy ones do grow.

**Note: The implementation of Kotter's eight statements need to be accomplished in a circular manner not a linear one!**

### ASSUMPTIONS

1. God expects His church to grow and that the primary role of the local church is to be that of reproduction. By this I mean the congregation is to be reproducing through the evangelism of new believers while pointing toward the starting of new congregations. The DNA of creation and the Church is reproduction. Churches not reproducing are disobedient congregations.
2. Most congregations are small (50-200), do not know what to do, resist change, yet want to see God do great things with them and feel guilt when great things do not happen.
3. The transformation model makes certain requirements of the pastor:
  - \* Be a leader (gift), have leadership skills and talents, or be open to and able to develop some leadership skills.
  - \* Be a leader of the sheep not the chaplain.
  - \* Be willing to lose one's position if the transformation does not work.
  - \* Become a life long learner about leadership, change, culture, and what makes congregations effective.
  - \* Be willing to stay at least ten years to see change happen.
4. This transformation model works at all levels, not just in the turn around of congregations. Once implemented it must be implemented again and again in order to maintain health and keep growing. Too often pastors think that once a major victory has been achieved or a significant turn around has been accomplished the transformation model is no longer needed because people will automatically follow them again is a reflection of poor thinking and leads to future disasters.

**THE LEADER**

1. The pastor needs to leave this seminar and have a personal encounter with God. The pastor needs to discuss with God:

- \* Am I willing to sacrifice my position for the sake of the Great Commission?
- \* Do I have a broken heart for lost people that could be reached through the extended ministry of the congregation?
- \* Do I have a broken heart for the community that could be changed through the ministry of the congregation?
- \* Am I willing to commit an extended time each week to pray for lost people in my community?
- \* Am I willing to read and learn all that is possible about leadership and change as well as visiting effective churches to learn why they are effective?

**VISION COMES FROM PASSION AND PASSION COMES FROM A PROPHETIC FIRE IN THE SOUL THAT CANNOT BE QUENCHED!!!!!!!!!!!!**

2. The pastor needs to become thoroughly acquainted with the transformation model before beginning to work with the congregation to bring change. It means having a plan for change and transition. Change always starts with new beginnings and focuses on what will happen. Transition always starts with losses and focuses on the emotions of those affected by changes, both positively and negatively. Both change management and transition management need to be thought through before transformation is initiated. Both plans are necessary for transformation. Also, God will change plans as they are implemented but always for the better.

**THERE ARE TWO EXTREMES TO AVOID**

1. READY, FIRE, AIM
2. THE PARALYSIS OF ANALYSIS

3. The transformation process can be moved along more rapidly if certain things occur:

- \* Pastors work through the process together with a mentor
- \* A denomination or large church can encourage such actions
- \* Denominations or large churches can resource congregations who commit to to such plans:

Provide assessments  
Offer training  
Provide financial incentives  
Hold accountability sessions

## 1. ESTABLISH A GREAT SENSE OF URGENCY

### 1. Do it from a theological perspective:

- \* In preaching begin to revisit the themes of judgment, hell, heaven, the lost etc.
- \* In preaching develop the responsibility of the church from Jesus' perspective as well as from the epistles.
- \* Use board meetings, fellowship events, etc to speak to these issues.
- \* Make it personal by telling stories of people in the community, use visuals.
- \* Present the negative in positive ways and relate the issues to yourself, let any individual or collective guilt come from the Holy Spirit.
- \* Let people overhear the need and come to conclusions themselves.

### 2. Do it from a congregational perspective:

- \* Begin to tell what will happen if the church continues on its path of decline.
- \* Reveal what the congregation accomplished in the past that is not happening today.
- \* Talk about who is not being reached, children, youth, etc.
- \* Make public the lack of conversions and the ratio of believers to unbelievers, and the cost of making disciples financially.
- \* Keep focus on the ministries that are not occurring or not being done well.
- \* Again, tell stories, and focus on the negative positively and let people come to their own conclusions, **Be Descriptive not Judgmental.**

### 3. Do it from a community perspective:

- \* Tell stories of the needs in the community.
- \* Interview on Sunday individuals in the community who are in touch with the needs, hurts, and pain.
- \* Make public the trends and plans of the community.
- \* Let people know who is helping in the community and what they provide and what they cannot provide.

### 4. Do it from a generational perspective (most small churches are missing key generational groups):

- \* Talk about who is missing and what that loss means to the congregation.
- \* Discuss what could be done if only that group were here.
- \* Help the congregation feel the loss of that group.

### 5. Do it from a national perspective:

- \* Let people know how pagan the nation is and is becoming.
- \* Demonstrate how the church across the nation is ineffective.

### 6. While communicating the urgency to a level of redundancy there are concurrent strategic moves you need to be making in order to leverage this part of the plan and gain maximum advantage:

- \* Gather as many of the Godly people who are committed to prayer as you can and get them to pray regularly and systematically for the needs you are surfacing. Keep this group(s) informed, pray with them at times, and share what they are doing regularly with the congregation.

\* Recruit an initiating group for the purpose of creating a future specific course of action (This group will **not** lead the change):

- ^ Involve the most discontented people
- ^ Use people with creativity and expertise
- ^ Keep this group small (no more than 5-7)
- ^ Help them articulate clearly the problems
- ^ Ask who must be discontent for change to happen?
- ^ Ask what success solutions will commit us to?
- ^ Develop a potential plan for change

\* Recruit a group of leaders (women and men) and/or potential leaders to disciple and mentor:

- ^ Disciple in the spiritual disciplines (spiritual leaders)
- ^ Disciple them in leadership, visit effective churches and leaders
- ^ Disciple them in change, bring in change agents
- ^ Disciple them in effective church thinking
- ^ Disciple them in using the culture to reach people
- ^ Disciple them to think in an outward framework
- ^ Disciple them to be dissatisfied with the status quo

7. There are two major points that must be understood about this piece of the process.

(1) The new vision cannot be offered as a choice between it and the status quo. The whole point of this process is to paint the status quo as undesirable. The status quo cannot remain a viable option. The major thrust is to make as many people as possible unhappy with the way things are currently. It is like getting an alcoholic to finally admit he or she is a drunk.

(2) You need to recognize that this part of the process will take a minimum of six months to two years to begin implementing. Churches do not become dysfunctional overnight. People living with dysfunction require time to fully realize they are sick and need help. Dysfunction is like weeds in a garden. They continue to grow and must constantly be uprooted.

## Questions:

## 2. CREATE A COMPELLING VISION

1. Creating a compelling vision, happens simultaneously with creating urgency. In other words while the pastor is creating a sense of urgency the pastor is also casting vision, casting vision, casting vision.
2. First let me say that at this point it is not necessary for the pastor to have a well worded highly crafted vision statement. What is crucial is that the pastor has a sense of how God wants to use this congregation to reach its community. The pastor needs to understand, even though the people probably will not, is that the larger the church the larger the vision must be. As one reformer said, quoting an ancient mathematician, give me a place to stand and I can move the world. The bigger one's place is to stand the more world can be taken.
3. The vision must be larger than the church or it becomes self-serving and will not ignite emotions or fuel souls of people to pursue it. Therefore, the vision must be stated in terms of what can be done to change the community. This results in larger worship services, more staff, bigger budgets, congregations that are generationally balanced, more ministries, etc. However, those are seen as tools for the real vision which is to touch a lost and pagan community that does not know its left hand from its right spiritually. It is that kind of vision that stirs people to service and giving both within the body as well as in the community and world.
4. The pastor's roles, tasks, and techniques in developing vision:
  - \* Pray that God will generate a passion within the congregation for reaching this particular community
  - \* Pray for wisdom to know what role and niche this congregation can have in reaching this community.
  - \* Walk and drive the community looking at it from Jesus's perspective.
  - \* Walk and drive the community on a Sunday morning you are off to see what people are doing.
  - \* Look for needs that are and are not being addressed.
  - \* Look for where people in the community congregate, what attracts them.
  - \* Interview police, mayors, city council people, hospital staff, business people etc.
  - \* Take the leaders you are discipling on tours and for interviews, have them do their own. (If other leaders will go take them as well).
  - \* Pay unchurched people to attend your church and have a third party interview them.
  - \* Become an expert on your community/join civic organizations
  - \* Dream of what it would take to be a church that could have some impact on its community.
  - \* Evaluate the kind of church you are to determine who you can reach.
  - \* Find what churches you could network with to accomplish more together.
5. The pastor's role in communicating vision:
  - \* Determine what you believe God's role for this congregation to be in reaching the community.
  - \* Prepare your stump speech. It needs to be a well reasoned development of what you see the church becoming and accomplishing. It should be filled with broad sweeping ideas and specific potential realities. It should describe in specific detail what things will actually look like in the next five to ten years.
  - \* You need to be able to give this stump speech in either three minutes or three hours.

- \* As you communicate vision, also remind people of the urgency you have been sharing and show how the vision is an answer to that which is urgent.
- \* You should plan in every Sunday service to communicate both urgency and vision.
- \* You need to discuss and lay out your vision with your initiating group.
- \* You need to discuss and lay out your vision with the leaders you are discipling
- \* Share vision with your prayer team(s) and ask them to pray for it to happen.
- \* You want to get groups, individuals, leaders to dream with you and let them add to your vision.
- \* If you can develop a catch phrase for the vision fine if not do not worry about it, the most important thing is to share dreams of a better future.

6. During the time period that you are sharing the urgency you are constantly sharing the vision with anyone who will listen, even those who cannot believe it or buy into it. In other words for the entire beginning of the transformation process share how the status quo is unacceptable while constantly describing a preferable future.

**Questions:**

**3. TAKE EVERYTHING ALREADY SAID ABOUT COMMUNICATING VISION AND MULTIPLY IT BY TEN.**

1. The biggest mistake most leaders make is to under communicate the vision. You need to share the vision to the level of redundancy. Remember vision is shared by:

- \* Telling stories (Your stories and the stories of others).
- \* Speaking positively, assuming and expecting the best in people.
- \* Preaching to the collective body in making application.

2. The entire vision or a piece of it needs to be shared every time you speak, write, and talk with people.

3. Every time you focus on the urgency you then move immediately to vision and how things can be different.

4. You must believe that God wants to accomplish great things through the congregation He has called you to lead. This means you believe in the vision.

**Questions:**

#### 4. BUILD A POWERFUL ENOUGH GUIDING COALITION TO HELP YOU IMPLEMENT CHANGE.

1. While communicating urgency and casting vision you begin to build a coalition of people to help you actually implement change.
2. Learn to distinguish between different kinds of leaders and then determine which of those leaders will help you, be neutral or ambivalent, and which ones will work against you.
3. First determine the real leaders of the congregation. To do this you need to distinguish between the formal and informal leadership structure. The formal structure is written down, states who is responsible for tasks, and represents the prescribed way of doing things. The informal structure is not written down, does not state who is responsible, and usually reflects how business is done. The informal structure determines how the church is run. Often some of the real leaders are in the formal structure while other key leaders are in the informal structure. The first goal is to determine who the real leaders are, establish relationships with them, and see how they respond to the issues of urgency and vision.
4. Secondly, develop those who have the potential to be both formal and informal leaders. Train, develop, and mentor these people so they will be open to your leadership and following the vision that God is going to give the congregation. Also, get these people to recruit others they will train and develop as well, so a continuing core of leaders are being brought along in the congregation. Take as many of these people to seminars and conferences on change as is possible. Expose them to effective churches and church leaders.
5. Remember your initiating group will not usually be your leaders. These are the thinkers and planners, who often by personality are the last people you want leading anything.
6. Develop another level of leaders who will be the workers deeply committed to you and the vision and who are willing to carry the work load of faithful ministry week in and week out.
7. Remember change will never come in dysfunctional systems without some people leaving. This means that at some point there will have to be face to face confrontations with leaders who find that their losses as a result of changes are more important to them than the implementation of a new vision. But such confrontation only comes after working hard at relationships, and making sure you have a large enough coalition to overcome any resistance such people might offer to stop change.
8. The pastor's job is to build a coalition at both the leadership level and congregational level to have enough clout to bring about change because people want to see the vision implemented and find the status quo no longer acceptable.

**NOTE:** This would be an excellent time for the church to have an outside intervention, such as a church assessment. The consultant could come in and confirm that the status quo is unacceptable and promote a vision that encourages the opportunity to reach and bring change to a community. The consultant could also provide prescriptions that relate to the plan that will be discussed in the next step. Also, if any key leaders are resisting the change, the consultant can assume the mantle of prophet and deal with them and their objections. An effective consultation has the potential to produce a high level of discontent with the status quo while offering a vision of a preferable future. Outside help is normally needed at some point.

#### Questions:



## 5. REMOVE AS MANY OBSTACLES TO THE VISION AS POSSIBLE

1. As the initiating group begins to develop the change plan, anticipate the obstacles that might be used to stop the plan.
2. The plan will always require more leaders and workers. Therefore be mentoring future leaders who in turn are developing others to work with them.
3. Go to many of the silent majority and ask them for finances to be used later for specific purposes, such as hiring staff and implementing specific ministries.
4. Look for staff before they are needed so that when the congregation is ready to hire full or part-time people you have a reservoir to draw from for new positions.
5. Be exploring materials and curriculum that will be used for new ministries, so that you do not have to do research when the time is ready.
6. Think through strategies about different ways to accomplish the same goals. It would be helpful to get references for suggested changes from leaders outside the church that are respected by potential problem people.

**MAJOR NOTE:** Ideas one through five are usually ignored in the change process and most people start the transformation process with idea six. It is for this reason most transformation efforts fail. This is particularly true if the pastor is not a good leader.

It is also assumed that during this time period the pastor has been doing what was expected when the pastor was hired. The better the pastor has performed, especially in preaching and demonstrating care, the more leverage the pastor has with the congregation. It is also assumed the pastor has been taking advantage of as many leadership opportunities as possible. Bank your relational coins!!

### Questions:

## 6. SYSTEMATICALLY PLAN FOR CHANGE INCLUDING IMMEDIATE SHORT TERM WINS

1. Develop a plan that will bring about systemic change (clearly defined reproducing systems that support a new mission) to the congregation. If necessary propose it as a three year experiment and allow evaluation on an annual basis each year during the three years. The following is a suggested plan of action:

\* Develop an outward focused mission (why the congregation exists) that says we exist to serve those who are here and those who are not here yet, however we will honor those not here yet as our primary constituent.  
**Every ministry of the church must be brought in line with this mission statement during the next three years.**

\* Bring the congregation together for an envisioning day to let them discuss, develop, hone, and own the vision the pastor has been communicating the last 6-24 months.

\* Restructure the church to act the size you want to become even though it will take awhile for that to happen. Create a structure that will support a church of 1000's even though you may only have 200 people. This

means:

- ^ Marrying authority/responsibility/accountability for all ministries.
- ^ Staff members lead the congregation while laity minister.

- a. Staff members lead those ministries that are culturally expected and they must grow or staff members are replaced.
- b. Board deals with policies, the ends of ministry, the future, and holds the pastor accountable for mission goals. (This is a model of board ministry adapted from John Carver).
- c. After spiritual qualifications, the main criterion for board membership is commitment to the mission and vision.
- d. Pastor and staff are responsible for leadership development of staff, board, and future leaders.
- e. Pastor and staff develop an assimilation program that has as its goal mobilization.
- f. Pastor, staff, and board, communicate high expectations of people in giving, service, and spiritual disciplines.
- g. Pastor and staff create excellent front doors (worship services that are contemporary and seeker friendly and groups that enable people to make friends).
- h. Pastor and staff shut back doors to encourage people to stay with excellent groups, children and youth ministries, caring, and opportunities for service within and outside the body.
- i. Pastor continues to communicate urgency and vision!

2. The plan needs to have a number of short term wins planned into it that are visible and recognizable by people. Examples might be:

\* Painting, landscaping, and/or remodeling of facilities to make them more attractive to new people.

\* Money in hand to hire new staff and implement new programs.

- \* New staff, even part-time people, who come on and demonstrate success immediately.
- \* New leaders that have been trained take positions and exercise a new level of expertise in fulfilling their responsibilities.
- \* New letterhead, logos, signage etc.
- \* New phone system that makes it easier for people to contact those in leadership, leave messages, and share prayer requests.
- \* New greeters that begin meeting people in the car park and helping them find their way into the worship facility.
- \* Meeting in different facilities that enhance the dynamics of the service.
- \* Serving refreshments, or doing it in new ways that please people.

3. There must be times built into the plan to allow long time attendees to grieve and celebrate the good aspects of former ministries that are no longer being implemented. Honor the past but never allow the past to stop the new mission and vision.

- \* Remember the status quo has become unacceptable because it is no longer relevant to the times, even though at one time it had been relevant.
- \* People in the past may have accomplished much even though today they have become entrenched in their ways. Their accomplishments need to be honored.

**Questions:**

### **8. DO NOT DECLARE VICTORY TOO SOON**

1. Those who may not like the changes will often bide their time until the new way of functioning runs into some problems. Please be assured there will be problems. When the problems come, if victory has already been announced, the disgruntled will use that declaration against the leaders. At that point in time it will carry weight and can bring the transformation process to a halt.
2. Also declaring victory sometimes causes those implementing the change to relax and they tend to enjoy the new rather than keeping at the implementation of transformation.
3. If the transformation plan has been offered as a pilot project for two or three years then there is no victory until the pilot is accepted as the norm by the congregation.
4. Once the former leaders who have resisted the change are forever silenced, moved to another church, died, or become so old they must just focus on living then it may be time to declare victory.
5. No church under 200 in average worship attendance can probably declare victory until it has clearly broken the 200 barrier, which probably means a minimum of 250 in average worship attendance for a year.
6. Remember the day you declare victory you are then immediately back into the cycle of creating urgency, forming an initiating group, and communicating a new vision. Usually those who helped you achieve the victory will not help you take the next hill. It is the new people who have come in as you are achieving the victory that you will need to be discipling to help you with the next transformation.

#### **Questions:**

## 9. ANCHOR THE CHANGES IN THE CORPORATE CULTURE

1. When things are going well in the new transformation is the time to change the by-laws to reflect the new way of doing things. Do this process with a few people while not taking the time of key people away from the transformation process.
2. Continue to increase the requirements for board and staff members, do not lessen them.
3. Continue to keep mission and vision before the people both in worship services and in the assimilation process with new people. Work as hard at showing how the vision is being implemented as you did in communicating a new vision when there was no vision.
4. Let people know that everything is being done to bring all decisions continually under the light of the mission and vision.
5. The pastor does not release ultimate leadership authority (the authority that is required to maintain the mission, vision, values, and structure) back to anyone, while demonstrating a willingness to be held accountable for missional goals and demonstrating a transparent honesty about failures, mistakes, and goals that are unrealized.
6. Confront issues that may lead to major problems while they are small. Do this in ways that are Biblical and redemptive. However, be firm and do not let anyone sway the congregation from the mission and vision.
7. Bring in consultants who will honestly tell you what changes need to be made and how to enhance the accomplishment of the mission and vision. Then demonstrate your willingness to listen to the outsider and make the needed changes. If you feel that recommendations detract from the mission and vision then you do not follow them and give evidence as to why that course of action is being followed.

### Questions:

### **CONCLUSION**

1. Church transformation is hard work and demands that someone be willing to be the leader and take the responsibility of leadership.
2. Church transformation is worth it because it enables us to redeem congregations that often meet in debt free facilities that produce little spiritual return for all the money invested.
3. Remember, the choice for any pastor today is slow painful death or deep painful change. There is pain either way, however, deep painful change presents the options of an exciting fulfilling ministry that can bring new life to many. The only control you and I have about pain to any degree is determining who will inflict it upon us.
4. Denominations and large churches can play key roles in assisting leaders that want to go through transformation. I believe they need to step up to this task. However they should only work with those that are willing to do the hard work of transformation.

Dr. Paul D. Borden  
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