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# Changing the Culture in Your Church

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When Tony Dungy became the head coach of the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers, the first thing he had to change a culture of losing. The culture of the locker room directly translated to the play on the field. Dungy didn't need to simply cast vision for winning; he needed to create a winning culture.

Culture is the predominating attitudes and behavior that characterize the function of a group or organization. I've come to believe the best definition of culture is "how things work around here."

Culture is why some companies can have remote employees and others have to use a time clock. Culture is why all the people who work at Zappos seem a little bit quirky. Culture is the reason some churches seem to have more than enough volunteers and others can't find any.

If you want to know why things are the way they are in your church, look no further than culture.

Sam Chand says culture trumps vision every time.

You can have an eternal mission and a vision for growth, and an unhealthy culture will undermine both.

Yes, your church might need systems and strategies. Sure, you might need to discover your mission or clarify your vision. But clarity in an unhealthy culture will lead to disaster.

Maybe you didn't create the culture of your church. Maybe it was created by the pastor before you and you inherited it. Or maybe it has been slipping for a long time and you're determined to change it.

*Here are five culture shifts that might need to happen in your church.*

### ***Culture Shift #1: From Us to Them***

A lot of churches act like a resort hotel. Multiple swimming pools. A buffet-style, all-you-can-eat cafeteria. A gift shop. All things to make the customers happy.

For churches, the sermons, ministries, and programs are designed for insiders in order to keep them coming and keep them giving. Everything is slanted to church members.

When church members feel like the church is for them, it creates an insider mentality. Decisions on spending and programming are slanted to keep the members happy.

But for the church to effectively fulfill the mission given by Jesus, the church has to shift from an insider mindset to an outward focus. Spending has to shift from making the members happy to reach people who are not a part of the church at all.

Instead of the hotel culture, work hard to create a hospital culture. Where the things you do – from programs to ministries – exist for those who need it most. If Jesus said he didn't come to call the well but the sick, your church should intentionally skew ministries and communication to reach the people outside the walls of the church.

Your church will drift toward a hotel culture on its own. It's just human nature to take care of yourself. You'll almost need to over-emphasize outreach and evangelism and an others-first mindset just to stay in balance.

When you create a culture that's welcoming to outsiders, they will take notice. People gravitate to places where they are accepted. They don't need to agree or understand it to want it. As Andy Stanley says, "people who were nothing like Jesus liked Jesus."

Is that same thing true of the culture of your church?

### ***Culture Shift #2: From Hiring Staff to Empowering Leaders***

Many churches suffer from a superhero staff culture, where the paid staff of the church are expected to do all of the ministry. Not only is this not the picture painted in the New Testament, it's terribly ineffective.

Paid staff in a church, whether full-time or part-time, is a great blessing. But all of the needs of a church and community cannot be met by hiring professionals. Senior Pastors, you're never going to have the budget to hire all the help you need. You will never hire your way to success.

If you don't have a good system to recurring volunteers and develop leaders, you will be tempted to think hiring people is the solution. You'll become a victim of silver bullet thinking.

*If we could just get that youth pastor, our church would take off. If we just had enough money to hire a full-time worship leader... If we had someone on the team to oversee outreach, it would be different.*

Our first reaction when we have a big need in the church is to hire staff. I think our first reaction should be to develop a team. You may never have enough staff, but your church is full of potential leaders who have more to offer than an hour or two on Sunday.

That's why you must shift the culture in your church away from a paid staff of super Christians to an empowered team of priests. In theological terms, this is the priesthood of the believer applied to volunteerism at church.

God gives some people the gift of leadership. They can inspire, rally, and lead people to talk action, even if they don't earn a paycheck from the church. And if people with the gift of leadership are not given the opportunity to lead, their passion will fade away.

So is it bad to hire people to meet a need? Of course not. But as [Dan Doerksen](#) says, "A new staff member shouldn't eliminate the need for volunteers, but multiply the number of people involved."

When you do hire staff, make sure their number one job is to develop leaders. That way, you'll continue to build a culture where it's normal for everyone to serve and some to lead.

### ***Culture Shift #3: From Consumer to Contributor***

Pastors need to create and model a culture where it's normal to contribute, not just attend. We preach against it, but we must reinforce the ideas with actions.

How can we help people understand that church isn't a product to be consumed but a mission that requires our involvement? How can we get people to get out of their seats and into the game?

- **First**, celebrate normal acts of service. So many times, the stories we tell in the church have fairy tale endings. They end in salvations or baptisms or healing. And while those stories are awesome, everyday stories of struggle make just as big of an impact. Normal stories from busy people who find an hour to serve will connect with other busy people in your congregation. Learn to celebrate the ordinary, not just the supernatural.
- **Second**, create great environments where people can use their gifts. If you want people to serve, make it meaningful for them. Too many times, churches ask people to step in and save a dying program or fill a slot out of desperation. If you want people to contribute, make it fun and

interesting. Prepare for people to serve and ask them to step into something that's organized. Preparation shows value.

- **Third**, cast a compelling vision. Show people how serving is good for their soul, not just for your church. Talk about what you want for them, not just from them. And leave out the guilt – it doesn't work anyway. You may be able to guilt someone into meeting a short-term need, but there's no way guilt works as a long-term motivation for serving.

#### ***Culture Shift #4: From Programs to Purpose***

The reach of your ministry is not determined by how many programs you offer but by how each program fits your ultimate purpose and mission.

There's a good chance your church is too busy. And if that's the case, the results can be devastating.

Busy churches are led by busy pastors who jump from one thing to the next and from opportunity to opportunity, never experiencing the long tail results that come from consistency.

Somehow, we know the very boring snowball method can help us pay off debt and ultimately result in financial freedom. We understand that it's eating right and exercising on a regular basis, not some fad diet or supplement that makes us healthy. Yet, we completely miss the fact that consistent programs and ministries over time lead to life change. It's like we'd rather do a new event or launch a new ministry just for the sake of doing something different.

We have to look at our menu of ministries and ask tough questions. It's not, "is this good?" but "is this effective?" All of the ministries in your church are good – they were launched by good people who wanted to do good. But they may have lost their effectiveness years ago. It's not, "Do I like this program?" but "Does this program help us accomplish our stated vision?"

We need to get good at a few things and work hard to make sure those few things are truly connected to our mission. Otherwise, you'll have a culture of busyness rather than effectiveness in your church.

### ***Culture Shift #5: From Blame to Resolve***

So far, we've been talking about changes you need to lead. But this last shift is a change you need to embrace personally.

There are a lot of reasons why your church can't change. There are some things that are out of your control. But there is something in your control.

You. This shift is all about you.

Not long ago, I worked with a church to help them break some growth barriers. They experienced some growth in the past but things had tailed off. They were stuck and they felt stale (their words). They paid me to help them identify issues and propose solutions.

When I consult with a church like this, I like to dive in pretty deep. I clicked through every page on their website and learned all I could learn online. I visited every environment on a Sunday morning and took detailed notes. I listened to the pastor's sermon and met everyone on the team.

In the end, I presented several recommendations in a report and a debrief session with the pastor. In that meeting, and in the subsequent weeks, the pastor told me all the reasons why my suggestions wouldn't work. He said he tried some of these things in the past. He told me his staff couldn't handle the workload. And he told me how busy he already was.

This pastor lived in the culture of blame. Instead of talking about what could change, he wanted to focus on what couldn't. On one hand, he knew things could be better (that's why he hired me), but on the other hand, he didn't want the responsibility of leading change.

Great leaders do not blame their elders, deacons, staff, budget or building. They take whatever talents the Lord has entrusted them and use them wisely. They leverage whatever influence they have, whatever resources they have and whatever time they have to do the most amount of good they can.

Tony Dungy took this approach when he took over the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. [Here's what he writes:](#)

I began to sell the philosophy that we are responsible for what happens to us, not anyone or anything else. No excuses, no explanations. At a team meeting, I ran through a laundry list of excuses our players could easily hang a poor season on if they chose to. Those were all great excuses and we could have used any and all of them. However, our goal was to win football games and excuses were not an option.

If you want to change the culture in your church, start with yourself. Don't blame others around you but ask yourself, "What can I do to be better." We've seen it over and over again...when the pastor gets better the church gets better.

- Buy some books. Read them. Discuss with your team.
- Go to a conference. Take notes. Implement one thing.
- Hire a coach. Listen. Listen some more.
- Try something new. Follow through. Be patient.

Amazing things will happen when you stop blaming your team, your circumstances or your environment and decide to work on yourself.

### ***Breaking Barriers***

Feel like your church should be growing, but it's not? From someone who used to be a pastor and church planter, I know it can be frustrating.

Ultimately, church growth is up to God. But are we doing everything we can to ensure our church is healthy? How do we overcome the barriers we feel are in front of us?

We know you care deeply about leading a healthy growing church because it means leading more people to Jesus. That's why we created a free guide to breaking barriers that will bring clarity and help begin to alleviate your frustrations.

Get your FREE copy of the Senior Pastor's Guide to Breaking Barriers today.

[Download the Guide](#)