

---

# What Do You Do When the Congregation Resists Change?

---

You've got a fresh idea or a new initiative that will really help your church reach people for Christ. You're excited about it and you believe it's what's next for your church.

But you introduce it to your team or share the vision with the church and the response is mediocre at best.

This might sound familiar to you because it's common in the church. Passion and vision don't always translate to the congregation. Many times, when you launch something new, it's not met with excitement, but push-back. The change you think is so necessary is the change that's actively resisted.

## *How to deal with resistance:*

### **1. Pushback is normal.**

Most people don't really like change, even if they believe it's for the better. Leaders may like change, but your church probably likes things the way they are. Think about it for a second...they are there because of the way things are right now.

So, before you push harder, stop to think that pushback is very common. *Few leaders launch a new initiative with 100% support.* Change, no matter how small, is a threat to what's normal. Give people the benefit of the doubt and

understand they aren't enemies just because they don't understand or like something.

## ***2. A few people can feel like a lot of people.***

When leading a change, a little bit of resistance can really feel like a punch to the stomach. If you believe the vision is from God and the change is necessary, pushback can feel like an attack. And a few people can feel like an entire army.

Someone is not the same as everyone. Just because a few loud people have some concerns doesn't mean the whole church is about to revolt. It's important to listen to feedback from the people, but it's equally important not to let feedback from a few feel like everybody complaining in unison.

When people come to you and say, "Pastor, some people think..." stop them right there. Say, "Who are these people? Which people? What are their names?"

## ***3. Address people individually.***

When you do learn about specific people that have issues, the mature thing is to talk to them individually. One of the worst things you can do is preach a message on unity that's really aimed at a small group of people. It's bad leadership to send mass emails really intended for just a few people.

Just like you don't want to create policies and procedures to address one person, you don't need to make blanket statements and address widespread concerns to deal with a few people.

Instead, sit down with them individually. Listen to their concerns. You might find that what they really want is simply to be heard. Many critics change their tune once their point of view is truly heard. If you need to explain changes or answer questions, a one-on-one setting is better. Cast vision publicly, but answer people's questions privately.

#### ***4. Keep explaining the why behind the what.***

You're already convinced the change or the initiative or the program is necessary.

The people in the church are not.

They don't live in your world and they aren't privy to all of the conversations and prayers leading to the new focus.

That's why you must continually cast vision and explain the why behind the what. When you're sick of saying it, people are just starting to get it. Even though you've said it a dozen times, find a new angle or a new story that will help people understand.

You can't communicate the vision of your church with one vision message a year. You can't communicate the deep need for change with a few emails or a well-produced video. You've got to stay on message and keep reminding people.

When casting vision for the future, use the word "imagine." That's a trigger word that has a way of directing people's thoughts to tomorrow. Most people think tomorrow can be better than today, so when you're casting vision, use this word to help people see the preferred future and catch a small glimpse of what is possible.

#### ***5. Take a long-term view.***

When you're trying to lead change in your church, it's usually because you believe there's something at stake and something has to be done now.

But I want to encourage you to take a long-term view. Yes, the program you want to start and the change you want to make is important, but 10 years from now, you're not going to remember if you launched it in January or if you launched it in September.

Taking the time to do it right increases people's confidence in your leadership. When they see it's carefully planned not just an immediate response, they are more likely to go along. Too many churches have been harmed by great ideas from conferences implemented too quickly and haphazardly.

Looking back has a way of providing perspective. So as you look ahead to what needs to be done in your church, combine a sense of urgency with patience and good leadership. If you need to build momentum, have a few more conversations, and develop a more robust launch plan, it's probably worth the time.

I've heard this many times in different ways: We overestimate what we can do in a year and underestimate what we can do in ten.

## **6. *Don't be mean.***

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins found humility is one of the top qualities of top leaders in great companies.

Shepherds aren't very common in the United States, but people in Bible times would be well-acquainted with the metaphor. As a pastor, you've got to shepherd your church with love and care. You can't be mean to the sheep.

A lot of pastors don't get buy-in from key leaders or the congregation simply because they aren't very nice.

- Everyone who disagrees with you isn't the enemy.
- People in your church who don't agree are not sent from the devil.
- Someone with a question isn't being divisive.

Love and shepherd people well, even those who don't understand or agree.

## **7. *Focus on benefits.***

Anytime there's a new focus, there will be pushback from people. Pushback isn't bad! It's an opportunity to clarify the importance of something.

Instead of focusing on what's being taken away, talk about the benefits.

Remember, people don't always care about mission, vision, and values as much as they care about themselves, their families, and their jobs. When you're casting a vision for change, focus some of your communication on benefits. What positive outcome will result from this change?

- Don't just take away the Sunday night service – highlight the benefits that will come from the new small group ministry.
- Don't just change the service times – talk about how it will be easier for parents with kids to participate.
- Don't just cancel the special event that no longer works – show people how the time and money will be better invested in improving another ministry.

People still may not like the change, but at least they will understand it.

Communicating benefits isn't the same as allowing people to be selfish or making it all about the people. A lot of people in the church are wise enough to understand that while the benefits might not directly affect them, the change will benefit the church.

### *Senior Pastor Resource*

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. As a result 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](#)