
Why Church Leaders Should Think “Who” Instead of “What”

Church leaders spend most of their time answering “what” questions.

- What is the next teaching series?
- What are we going to do for Easter?
- What can we do to get more people signed up for an event?
- What is the best curriculum to use for kids?

Occasionally, we find time to dive into the “why” questions that help us re-focus on our purpose and mission.

But some of the most important questions we can answer are “who” questions.

This advice is primarily written to business leaders looking to take a company from good to great, but listen to how Jim Collins frames the challenge:

“The executives who ignited the transformations from good to great did not first figure out where to drive the bus and then get people to take it there. No, they first got the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and then figured out where to drive it. They said, in essence, “Look, I don’t really know where we should take this bus. But I know this much: If we get the right people on the bus, the right people in

the right seats, and the wrong people off the bus, then we'll figure out how to take it someplace great.

The good-to-great leaders understood three simple truths. First, if you begin with “who,” rather than “what,” you can more easily adapt to a changing world. If people join the bus primarily because of where it is going, what happens if you get ten miles down the road and you need to change direction? You’ve got a problem. But if people are on the bus because of who else is on the bus, then it’s much easier to change direction: “Hey, I got on this bus because of who else is on it; if we need to change direction to be more successful, fine with me.” Second, if you have the right people on the bus, the problem of how to motivate and manage people largely goes away. The right people don’t need to be tightly managed or fired up; they will be self-motivated by the inner drive to produce the best results and to be part of creating something great. Third, if you have the wrong people, it doesn’t matter whether you discover the right direction; you still won’t have a great company.”

As a pastor or church leader, this should resonate with you and challenge you. Instead of coming down from the mountain like Moses and attempting to vision-cast your way toward momentum, focus on building a team (even a small team will do) of leaders who are committed to figuring out the answers to important questions.

If you have the right people around you, you can lead your church to change, start the right programs and ministries, and adapt when culture changes. If you have the right people on the bus, they will help you steer it in the right direction toward accomplishing your mission.

Collins goes on to say that one of the most important questions the leader of an organization can ask and answer is this: What percentage of the right seats are filled with the right people?

Let’s talk more about why developing people is worth your time.

#1 – *People are more important than programs and projects.*

It's easy to allow the stuff of ministry, things like planning services and running programs, to keep you from relationships with the very people you're designing those services and programs for.

But just like people development is one of your biggest barriers to growth, developing people provides one of your biggest opportunities.

After all, it's people who will run those programs.

It's people who will lead those projects.

It's people who will plan every service.

You might even argue that people, not programs, buildings, or services, are at the heart of ministry. [Dave Rhodes](#) asks a poignant question:

“If 80% of your church's time, energy, and effort goes into making Sunday morning happen, is it a church or a production company?”

Every service is an opportunity to lift up the name of Jesus. Every small group is a chance to help someone take the next step. Every event affords us the opportunity to minister to people.

But let's not forget that *people* run programs designed to reach people.

When you have people to lead programs, you can have better programs. When you have the right people leading ministries, your ministries will be more effective.

#2 – *You're equipping the saints for the work of the ministry.*

Ephesians 4:11-12 is a familiar verse for pastors and church leaders, describing how Christ gave the church leaders in order “to equip his people for works of service.”

Pastors and church leaders are not supposed to do all of the work of the ministry; they are supposed to develop, disciple, and equip others to do so.

These words from Paul were actually modeled by Jesus, who invested the best years of his ministry into developing a small group of disciples who would ultimately spread the gospel beyond the region.

This seems counter-cultural today, where the fastest-growing churches are recognized by the size of the crowds.

It was counter-cultural in Jesus' time as well.

“When other rabbis then and teachers now build a platform, Jesus built a pipeline, and his impact was inconceivably greater,” writes Will Mancini in *Future Church*.

In a world of social media followings and YouTube sermons, there's something refreshing about pastors and church leaders who invest in people. It's almost as if that is the preferred strategy.

Most pastors agree that developing leaders is a big opportunity and that a lack of leaders is hindering the ministry. Whenever we ask pastors to list their top challenges, this is always in the top three. Usually, it's right at the top of the list. It really is a constant struggle to find, train, and empower leaders.

One of the reasons this remains a challenge is because while we want to see more leaders get involved, we don't have a system for leadership development, and these tasks never appear on our calendar.

Your calendar is full of planning meetings, counseling sessions, and study time. But the leadership development kind of tasks are hard to quantify and difficult to plan. We hope it happens organically, but it never does.

It's time to move leadership development from something we desire to something we do.

We have to put it on the calendar. And we have to specifically define what "it" is.

Leader Pulse combines ready-to-use leadership development content in a calendar-based approach. It will give you the structure and the content you need to actually develop your staff and key leaders.

[Learn more about Leader Pulse here.](#)

#3 – Ministries without leaders will not have the desired impact.

Not only is people-first ministry a Biblical approach, but it will also actually help your church grow at a sustainable pace.

And this sustainable pace is something church leaders aren't talking about enough.

The impact you want to make on your community isn't dependent on a single service, a special event, or a specific ministry. You're looking for compound interest, serving consistently over time.

The flip side is starting ministries only to see them slowly fade away into irrelevance because there are no leaders to sustain them. You'll start, stop, start, stop until everyone is simply worn out.

If you don't develop leaders, your church will struggle to make a long-term impact in your community.

That's why we advise pastors to never [start a new ministry in their church](#) until it has a committed and trained leader and is aligned with the overall church strategy.

You'd be better off waiting. Or going without.

But when you have committed and aligned leaders, your church will be set up well to grow healthy.

That's why it's always wise to start with people, not programs.

[Take the Next Step](#)

Leading people is one of the most difficult tasks of pastoral leadership. [The Senior Pastor's Guide to Leading Staff](#) will help you lead yourself so that you can better lead the people on your team.