



Thrive in Ministry

Creative Problem Solving

Three Questions:

When was the most recent time when someone in your church engaged in sabotage?

How does sabotage impact your ministry?
How does it affect your resilience as a leader?

What does it mean to move to the balcony as a leader? How would this help you understand what is going on in a challenging situation?

Peter's visit to Cornelius' house is such a significant transition in the life of the church it is told in two consecutive chapters, Acts 10 and Acts 11. Paul would spread the Gospel to the Gentile world, but this mission began with Peter. The Covenant of Abraham required that all faithful followers of God would be circumcised. How would the church receive Gentiles? Should they receive Gentiles? This problem had the potential to split the church.

Disestablishment forces the church to face challenges that the church has not faced in generations. For centuries, the ministry of the church has focused around the building and a full-time, paid clergy. While these are still the "norms," they are increasingly untenable for many churches. These are just two of the most notable challenges that the church is facing today.



Closely related to resiliency is another characteristic of excellent ministry in a rapidly changing society. In our project discussions, we came to call it agility, implying nimbleness and resourcefulness in response to new challenges. -Jackson Carroll

Familiar Patterns

When pastors encounter challenges or problems, they often find these playing out a script. Most pastors have experienced at least two of these patterns.

Controlling Laity: Most pastors, especially young pastors, encounter a church with strong lay or family leadership. They might not say the words, but the

meaning is clear, "Pastor your job is to preach, we will take care of running the church."

Pastor as Expert: For generations, pastors have been trained as experts in the life of the church. Historically, pastors were often the most educated person in the congregation.

Charismatic Leader: Some pastors have the personality and gifting to be charismatic leaders.

They draw people into relationships that give them extraordinary influence (and even control).

Pastor as Authority: In some contexts, the pastors can function as an authoritarian leader. Because of cultural norms, expertise, or charismatic personality, these pastors can make decisions and the church willingly follows (at least for a time). During times of anxiety, people often look for authoritarian leaders.

The reality is that churches need new models for pastoral leadership to address the challenges in the current age. It is important for pastors and congregations to develop creative ways of addressing challenges.

Leadership in the Age of Anxiety

Reframe the question: Even when they know the fallacy of seeking a magic bullet answer, people often revert to “seeking the right answer.” Friedman describes this as a treadmill. Leaders can run harder, try harder, and seek the right answers, but they will still be stuck on the treadmill. Trying harder will not solve adaptive challenges. In order to begin finding creative answers, leaders must begin to reframe the questions: “How do we grow?” “How do we teach stewardship?” “How do we do leadership training?” These are treadmill questions. (Friedman, 2007, pp. 37–38)

Imagination: Nurturing imagination and creativity is an aspirational goal for most organizations and especially churches. The problem is that churches are often locked in gridlock. This is often identified by resistance, either/or thinking, sabotage, secrets, and scapegoating. (Steinke, 2006, pp. 115–121) At root, Imagination and creativity are emotional processes. Friedman writes, “In order to imagine the unimaginable, people must be able to separate themselves from surrounding emotional processes before they can even begin to see (or hear) things differently.” (Friedman, 2007, p. 31)

Rethinking Leadership: This journey through disestablishment requires new skills for leaders. The pastor must seek to manage his or her own reactivity to the anxiety and reactivity of the congregation and other leaders. This requires the pastor to intentionally be

aware of the emotional process. Pastors must lead with stamina because change does not happen quickly or without great resistance and sabotage. This age requires marathon leadership, not a series of sprints. The pastor who leads change will only be able to lead through this process with stamina and differentiation.

Balcony View: Imagine that leading creative change is like ballroom dancing. Much of the dance will only be learned by being on the dance floor: learning to feel and move to the music, practicing the steps, working with your partner, etc. However, to improve, there are times when a dancer needs to step into the balcony and watch others dance. There they can watch other dancers, their movements, the way they work with their partner, and even the mistakes they make. Creative leadership requires that leaders move between the dance floor and the balcony. To stay in either place inhibits the process of learning the dance. (Parks, 2005, p. 50)

The Spirit of Adventure

There is something joyful and scary about beginning a great adventure. Adventures stretch people beyond what they could imagine doing. The movie *Hidden Figures* tells the story of how through new thinking and looking in unexpected places, they were able to discover the resources needed for the grand adventure. New questions had to be asked. Barriers had to be smashed (sometimes with a sledge hammer). Pastors must cultivate the spirit of adventure as they seek to lead their church into a new age.

Journaling Assignment:

Your pastor is struggling with a strong lay leader who seems to be sabotaging some of the changes in the church. How do you help your pastor process this relationship.