
A Few Practices of Leadership for Church



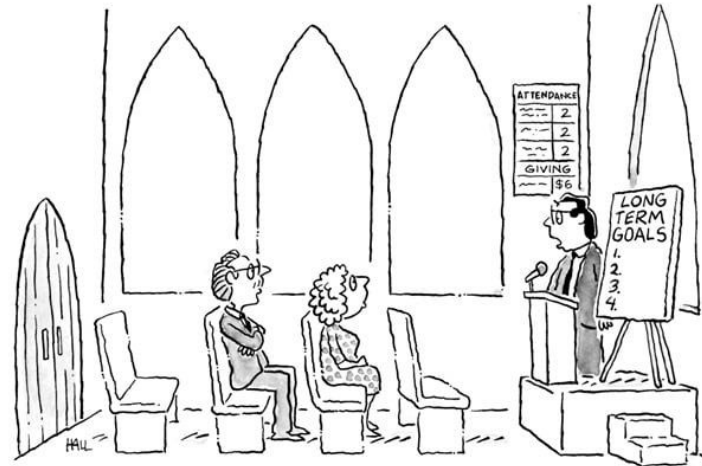
Rev. David H. Messner, Ph.D.
September 2019, Revised November 2023

7 Leadership Practices (an incomplete list...)

We as leaders...

1. Know who we are
2. Relate directly, authentically, and with kindness
3. Don't Freak-out
4. Listen to Many Voices, Speak with One
5. Empower our people relentlessly
6. Watch (a triple) bottom line
7. Are unafraid to fail on behalf of the church AND
Will not let each other fail nor fall away

Strategic Aspirations (The What)



"So, you think we should become a mega-church, Earl?
Would you elaborate on that?"

What are the aims of a “Religious Life” of “Belonging” and of “Church”?

Strategic Aspirations (The How)

In Church, how we do what we do is as important as what we do.

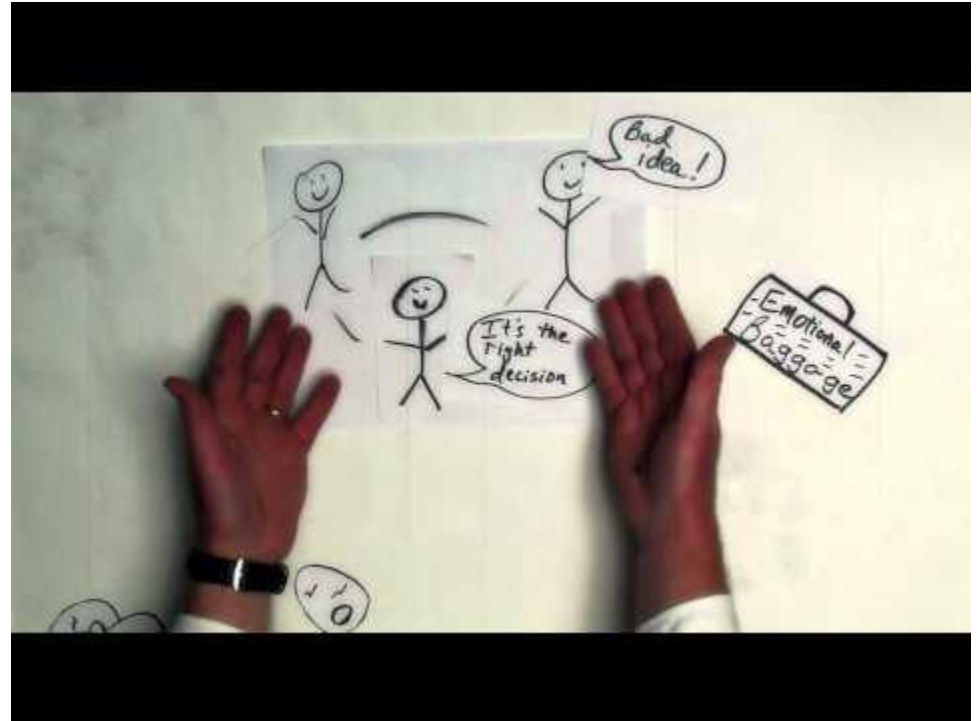
Angus MacLean, “The Method is the Message”:

“If our faith cannot produce a blueprint of human origin and destiny, or a reasonable “plan of salvation” spanning eternity, it can perhaps, find a no less significant, and a much more empirically founded, wisdom in processes of living. With these and by these we can be open-minded about many things that without them would overwhelm us.”

I believe that if we get the “how” right, we will go farther than we can imagine.

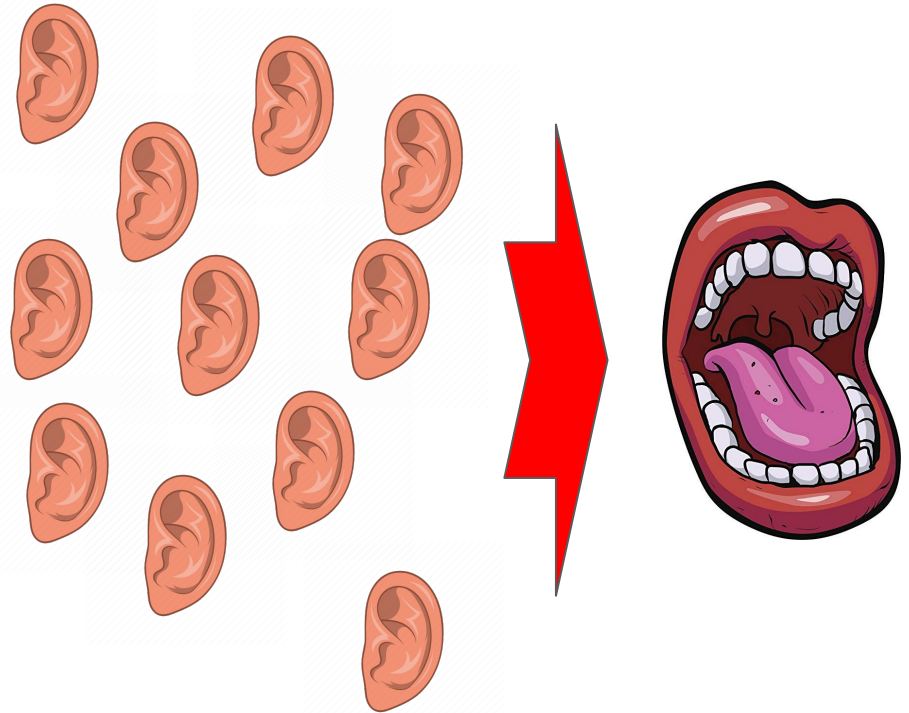
One, Two, and Three from Friedman

- Know who we are
(self-differentiation)
- Relate directly,
authentically, and with
kindness
(non-triangulation)
- Don't Freak-out
(non-anxious presence)



Listen to Many Voices, Speak with One

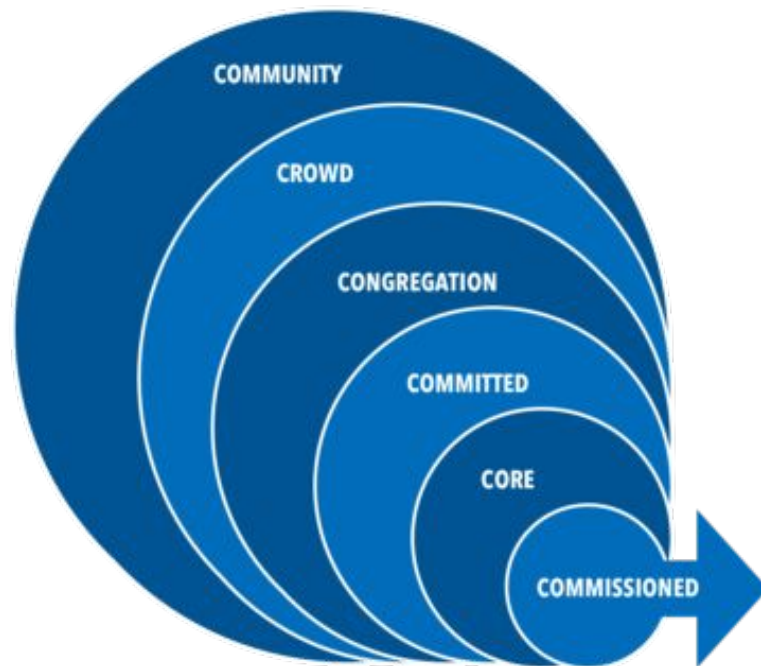
- Be open to the diversity of ideas, even novel ones
- Discern, deliberate, and debate together with charitable spirit
- Choose a path forward, by consensus when possible
- Then communicate and act with commitment as a leader on behalf of the church



Empower Our People Relentlessly

- Invite people in
- Invite people to take part
- Invite participants to lead
- Invite leaders to be builders
- Teach everyone to repeat the process for others
- Recognize and appreciate seven ways from Sunday

Applies to Board, Staff, and Ministers too



Watch (a triple) Bottom Line

Isaiah 58: “Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless...”
And so, let's say we start serving soup every Sunday night...

There are different questions we might ask when measuring this ministry

1. Is the soup edible, is it delicious even?
2. How many hungry people did we feed with the soup?
3. How many people were involved (or more involved) in making the soup?
4. How did we strengthen the church to feed hungry people in the future?
5. How much money did we collect as a result of the soup eating?

And finally, # 7, The Failure Principles

We as leaders are unafraid to fail on behalf of the church

AND

We as leaders will not let each other fail nor fall away

“My hope is that being part of this little church community, and having a deep faith in our own hearts will equip us to act in the world with less fear, and with more imagination and courage.

I want us to be a church that inspires beyond the visible frontier of the likely and into the more uncertain territory of the necessary.”

-- Rev. David Messner

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A Closing Prayer

A Prayer for Leaders by the Rev. William F. Schulz

O God. I am a leader. O God! Teach me to practice patience and forbearance in the wake of every comment, no matter how inane. Sustain me in the face of hidden motives, manipulation, passive aggressiveness, and aggressive passivity. Grace me with the knowledge that progress is halting and resistance is to be expected. Make me a person of integrity and align our collective vision with our organizational health. Remind me regularly of our long-term mission and larger faith. Help me to worry less about my legacy and more about whether I make glad the paths of those who journey with me. Insist that I laugh. Let me never forget that “this too will pass.” Grace me with gratitude.

I am a leader.

O God! Amen.

From Bless the Imperfect: Meditations for Congregational Leaders. Skinner House Books.

Questions and Discussion



Staff Supervision Resources for Good Offices People Rev. Amy Petrie Shaw



(c) Amy Petrie Shaw 2023

“The Choir Director’s out sick, so they’re all a bit lost.”



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“Due to our crowded calendars, the staff would like to schedule our weekly meetings for Sunday mornings at 10:45. Is that okay with you?”

SUPERVISION LIFELINES

1. Clearly defined goals
2. Clear job expectations
3. Specific job descriptions
4. Appropriate tools
5. Empowerment
6. Healthy feedback
7. Fair compensation
8. Structured communication
9. Appreciation

*Good Officers can help
to keep the lines clear!*



Clergy Burnout & Compassion Fatigue Learnings

Rev. Aaron Payson, Presenter

This resource offers learnings gleaned from this research by Jacobson, Jodi, et. al. *“Risk for Burnout and Compassion Fatigue and Potential for Compassion Satisfaction Among Clergy: Implications for Social Work and Religious Organizations”* Journal of Social Service Research (39:455-468, 2013).

- Clergy are front-line mental health providers.
- Studies show that on average clergy spend 15% of their time providing pastoral counseling [or spiritual support] – based on a 50-hour work week, this equates to more than 138 million hours of counseling service annually.
- Clergy (like social workers) are at increased risk for work-related stress and negative outcomes from trauma work, such as burnout and compassion fatigue. Limited training and unfamiliarity with community mental health resources contributes to this reality.
- Resistance to referral between clergy and social workers due to lack of knowledge of resources suggests more work needs to be done to develop collaborative approaches to this common work.

Clergy Burnout & Compassion Fatigue Learnings

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- Burnout is associated with a gradual onset of hopelessness, work overload or difficulty and decreasing levels of job satisfaction. Feelings of disillusionment and despair are symptomatic of burnout which is aided by constant changes within ministry roles and vocational tasks, which can lead to a sense of overwhelm.
- Early 2000's survey of 1000 pastors showed that 50% considered leaving their positions within the 3 months prior to completing the survey. This was considered then to be an indication of a coming crisis in pastoral leadership.
- Compassion fatigue is described as a “natural, predictable, treatable and preventable consequence of working with suffering people.” This is the result, of working with traumatized people. Clergy are susceptible because they often counsel people in crisis exposing them to stressful situations and traumatic stories.
- Compassion fatigue can have a rapid onset or develop slowly over time.

Clergy Burnout & Compassion Fatigue Learnings

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- Symptoms of compassion fatigue include intrusive thoughts and images, avoidant behaviors and unwanted reminders of traumatic events.
- Compassion fatigue is exacerbated by role confusion, role overload and lack of formal education in psychosocial interventions.
- Compassion Satisfaction – despite the risk for burnout and compassion fatigue clergy also report high levels of satisfaction with their vocations. This is also true for trauma counselors. (This may be due to “survival bias”).
- Clergy exhibit higher levels of depression which can also exacerbate burnout and compassion fatigue.
- Demographic and organizational characteristics of congregations that are associated with burnout include: age, years working, gender, job & salary satisfaction and congregation size.

Clergy Burnout & Compassion Fatigue Learnings

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- Younger clergy and those with less experience in ministry are more likely to experience symptoms of burnout most likely due to not having developed good coping skills for particular vocational stressors
- Smaller congregation size can contribute to burnout because of greater work demands and role ambiguity among clergy. Younger clergy are more often called to smaller congregations.
- The literature is split on the issue of gender, with some research reporting that male clergy are at a higher risk for burnout.
- Low salaries is often directly related to job satisfaction contribute to burnout and are also associated with increased work and family stress.
- Recent research shows that increased years ordained or years ministering predicted higher levels of burnout and decreased potential for compassion satisfaction.
- The presence of depression is highly associated with the potential for burnout and decreased compassion satisfaction.