

the church as a system trying to maintain equilibrium. The leaders and planners should discuss up front how they plan to process and deal with resistance (LeBrasseur et al., 2002). A strong communication plan may reduce or eliminate resistance

Sustainability Actions

The final step to implement a new program is to sustain the program by routinizing it into the habits of the church (Ayas & Zeniuk, 2001; Linton, 2002). This is best accomplished if the initial planning considers how the program will be normalized in the church (Johnson et al., 2004). Routinization is accomplished when people see how the church has truly benefited, and by insuring leadership successors are true believers in the program (Kotter, 1995).

Summary

This study found that a church's transformation began when it converted from group classes for discipleship to one-on-one discipleship. By following the recommendations for action above, a church that wants to transform itself could experience substantial change in the effectiveness of their disciple-making.

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A LOOK IN THE MIRROR™

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Becoming a Highly Effective Disciple-Making Church

Pat Morley

In general, churches have not been effective in making disciples. Many churches want to make disciples, but they are stuck in a rut. In search of a solution, I conducted a case study to analyze how and why one church transformed itself into a highly effective disciple-making church.

I found a church that has existed for 36 years, but ten years ago found itself with serious problems. For example, the people in the church lacked spiritual depth and commitment, and the church was not very well organized. The church started an intensive one-on-one 16 week discipleship program and strongly encouraged every existing and new member to complete the program. An estimated 700 people have completed the program.

In the ten years since, attendance has approximately doubled from 400 attendees to 800 attendees. The church has sent out a number of missionaries from within, they are debt free, 70% of its attendees tithe, and 60% give more than a tithe. People have been trained to study the Bible for themselves and have a daily Christian experience. The burden on the pastoral staff to shepherd and train members has decreased. It has become less likely that someone can simply drop out and not be noticed or cared about.

Both the senior pastor and program champion attributed this growth and transformation to the one-on-one discipleship program.

Recommendations for Action

The following recommendations are for senior pastors or church leaders interested in transforming into a highly effective disciple-making church through a one-on-one discipleship program. Each recommendation is based on findings in the case study church which are supported in academic literature. It is conjectured that similar results may be attainable with small groups of up to four people.

Leadership Actions

The senior pastor must be firmly committed to not only support but to be personally involved in both the initial program implementation and the ongoing execution until sustainability is reached (Beer, 2003; Collins, 2001; Kotter, 2001; Lebrasseur et al., 2002; Miller, 2002; Okumus, 2003). The

senior church staff, including lay leaders, will also need to believe in the program because they are needed to help build organization-wide commitment (LeBrasseur et al., 2002). A program champion who is capable and committed will need to recruit a team of likeminded individuals (Ayas & Zeniuk, 2001; Beer, 2003; Freedman, 2003; Kotter, 1999; McNish, 2002). Any church staff who are part of the implementation process must also be committed (Alexander, 1985; Beer, 2003; Houston-Philpot, 2002). Leadership is reserved for those who have been through the discipleship program.

Vision Actions

The senior pastor should gather and analyze information that points to the problem, need, and opportunity for a discipleship program (Freedman, 2003). This information and the vision that emerges should be expressed as a clear, resonant, inspirational vision statement that creates a sense of urgency (Kotter, 1995, 1996, 2001). The vision must seem to the leaders and people like it will work, and then it must work in practice (Johnson, Hays, Center, & Daley, 2004; Pluye, Potvin, & Denis, 2004).

People Actions

For the implementation to succeed, capable people have to be recruited for every position (McNish, 2002). They must be trained and supported by church policies that set priorities and allocate resources (Okumus, 2003). People should not be pressured for early results (Repenning, 2002). They should be included in the planning process to build a sense of ownership (Rogers, 1995; Kotter, 1995). They should understand what is expected from them, but in a culture that allows them psychological safety to speak out and process their reservations (Ayas & Zeniuk, 2001; Freedman, 2003; McNish, 2002).

Planning Actions

A potential discipleship program is selected. Once all the data have been gathered and analyzed by all the involved constituencies, the decision is made to adopt the program (LeBrasseur et al., 2002). This process proceeds slowly to give everyone time to register concerns and work out their issues. Next, but also along the way, the strategy suggested by the data (what the organization will do) and the vision (where the church wants to end up) takes shape (Freedman, 2003). The strategy suggests planning issues, and a plan is formulated to implement the program (how it will happen and who will do it). The planning stage should identify who will be involved, how they will be resourced, and what the schedule will look like (Freedman, 2003; McNish, 2002). An atmosphere should be created in which people can express their reservations (Houston-Philpot, 2002). The planning process should consider how the program will be sustained from the start (e.g., the necessity of senior pastor involvement and developing organization-wide commitment). These plans do not necessarily need to be elaborate written plans (Thurston, 1983). Strong consideration should be given to a one-on-one discipleship program but, in any event, classroom style teaching does not generally produce satisfactory discipleship results.

Resource Actions

Having the required resources at the place where they are needed at the time they are needed is crucial to program success (Johnson et al., 2004, Repenning, 2002). The planning team identifies the structures, time, budget, expertise, training, and any incentives that will be needed (Ayas & Zeniuk, 2001; Beer, 2003; Johnson et al., 2004; Linton, 2002; Okumus, 2003). These resource allocations are approved by the senior leadership or other appropriate decision-making entity.

Execution Actions

Next, it is time to take action, but first as a pilot project that runs parallel to the existing program structures (Houston-Philpot, 2002; LeBrasseur et al., 2002). The pilot projects give people a chance to get used to the program, debug it, attract additional support, quell resisters, and prevent major mistakes (Okumus, 2003). Those tasked to implement the program are involved at all stages of planning to increase ownership and the probability of success (Maurer, 2005). Once the pilot project(s) demonstrate success, the program can be rolled out to the entire church.

Once the program is initially implemented, the likelihood of success can be increased by encouraging feedback through formal evaluations and maintaining a system to gather information (Okumus, 2003). Examples to gather feedback are debriefs and project audits (Ayas & Zeniuk, 2001; Popper and Lipshitz, 2000). Of course, mid-course corrections will be necessary to optimize the program (Beer, 2003). Several years may be required to achieve sustainability (Kotter, 1996). Therefore, a contingency for taking more time than expected should be built into the initial implementation plan. Taking longer than expected is a consistently reoccurring problem that should be planned for in advance (Alexander, 1985; LeBrasseur et al., 2002; Repenning, 2002).

Communication Actions

It is important to implementation success to start with a pervasive, organization-wide communication plan that reinforces the program, and especially the vision for the program, at every opportunity (Freeman, 2003; Kotter, 1995, 1996; Okumus, 2003). The communication plan should include benefits to the church, and early success stories should be publicized (McNish, 2002). However, the leadership should be cautious about declaring victory too early (Kotter, 1995).

Resistance Actions

The leadership should realize that every new program, left untended, will experience resistance. If resistance is encountered then program elements will need to be redesigned in response (Beer, 2003; Kotter, 1995). And it is not just people who resist change, but also the church itself as an organization because the system will try to maintain the *status quo* (Ansoff & McDonnell, 1990; Maurer, 2005; Senge, 1999). So it is important not to hope or pretend it will not happen and proactively identify resistance from both individuals and