10 Truths of Churches that Do a Great Job with Leadership Development

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Insights from helping 100 large churches develop a strategic framework for leadership development

Ever wonder why some churches ministries grow and multiply rapidly and others don’t?

Among many factors, one stands out across churches of all types and locations. It is the key accelerant to planting more churches, starting more campuses, and deploying more people to impact a city. The difference maker? How diligent a church is in leadership development.

In the past few years, Leadership Network has convened leading churches to accelerate their efforts in leadership development. These cohorts include about a dozen large churches that learn from one another’s models and together imagine a more fruitful pathway forward. These gatherings are part of HUB:Leadership Development, and to learn more about it, click here.

Through these and similar high-impact settings, I’ve had a chance to have a ringside seat learning from the best models that have reproduced leaders for kingdom expansion. What follows are 10 principles that form some of the best thinking in the church today on leadership development.

1. Each church embodies a vision so large that it cannot be accomplished with the current paid staff and volunteer leaders. A big dream actually heightens the need, energy and focus on developing enough leaders to accomplish the vision. Churches with big visions dream about planting other churches, developing multiple locations or broadening and deepening their impact on the city around them—such that their “fingerprints” are all over their community.
2. **Someone on the senior team wakes up each day thinking about leadership development.** It's best if the passion for leadership development resides in the lead pastor, who is shaping the overall church culture. The passion could also come from the "second-in-command." Whatever your specific setting, someone on the lead team needs to assume responsibility for leadership development across the whole church. This person gives energy and passion towards the development of leaders. Without this designated person, the focus of leadership development has a tendency to get lost in the business of preparing for the weekend and the myriad of ministries that happen throughout the week.

3. **Each church has embraced the idea that building multiplying leaders for God’s kingdom is their kingdom work.** “Sundays come along with alarming frequency.” It’s easy to be caught up in preparing and needing services, ministries and running the church. It’s easy to let weekend worship attendance become the key measure for success. The weekend, while important, is one of the easiest distractions from developing leaders. Even in the midst of many other "things to do" and "ministering to the masses," Jesus constantly developed leaders, and those following Him were ready to carry on the ministry after his death. Paul, similarly, was never without an apprentice (the Scripture often reads “Paul and...”) [Click here](#) to listen as Rich Birch of Unseminary interviews Brent about Critical Leadership Development Lessons from Growing Churches. Great churches pay special attention to what they reward and what they tolerate—both of which become part of shaping the church culture. It’s one thing to aspire to value leadership development, and another to really do it. The teams should ask themselves, “Do we have a value of leadership development? Are we rewarding it? Or is its absence something we are tolerating?”

4. **Each senior leader and his/her team have agreed on a single definition of the attributes they want their leaders to possess- at each level of their church leadership.** Leadership has many different definitions. A list of leadership competencies can be endless. Great leadership development churches have defined for staff what great leaders look like, regardless of where they lead. Staff and lay leaders have reached consensus of what “great” small group leaders (either Serve Teams or Life Group Teams) look like and what is true about their character, competencies and values. The same thing is true at all levels of responsibility all the way up to ministry directors, campus pastors or lead team members. Everyone is building leaders with the same characteristics in mind.

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The percentage of your current leaders who are **actively apprenticing** others is a key indicator on how well your church is doing in leadership development.
5. Each church evaluates staff and promotes staff not on their individual contributions alone, but on their ability to develop and produce leaders. We all love great performers but great churches reward, promote and champion those whose “performance” excels primarily in developing leaders. These realize the development of new leaders will determine if the church will be able to increase their impact in their communities regardless of the model of church they run.

6. Each church focuses on building leaders from within. Sometimes large churches operate like the New York Yankees. They prefer to “buy” talent on the free agent market rather than grow their major league roster from their farm system like the St. Louis Cardinals. Many times large-church staff are often made up of those who “cut their teeth and made a name for themselves” somewhere else. Just like the Cardinals, churches with great leadership development pride themselves on having staff that are almost entirely built from within. When you take that approach, you know the person, their commitment to your DNA, and their commitment to your vision and values. You know their track record. When you hire from outside, you hope it works out and they buy in and do well. If you believe “everything you need to your city is already in your church,” you focus on a homegrown strategy.

7. Each understands that apprenticing the right people is more important than the right curriculum. Great churches in leadership development realize that formal classroom content plays a small part in developing leaders. I would suggest written content should contribute no more than 10% of someone’s development. Giving people hands-on experience in the context of an apprenticing relationship is a chosen strategy for these types of churches. Those are churches that have thought through three questions: “What characteristics are we looking for in leaders we want to apprentice?”, “What’s our apprenticing strategy?” and “Are all our staff driving apprenticing down through their ministries?” One simple model of apprenticeship is used by Community Christian Church of Naperville, IL. It has five steps:
   • I do, you watch, we talk.
   • I do, you help, we talk.
   • You do, I help, we talk.
   • You do, I watch, we talk.
   • You do, and identify an apprentice, repeat the process.

Developing enough quality leaders is mission critical to accomplishing a big vision.
8. Great leadership development churches have made coaching others a key part of their model.
Some churches have described their leadership development processes as, “We throw new leaders in the pool and hope they learn how to swim.” Taking on new levels of leadership can be very stressful. Great churches here pride themselves in helping new leaders be successful. These churches coach their leaders, paid and unpaid, throughout their ministry journey. Again, churches that are “winning” in leadership development have everyone signing off the same song sheet in their coaching model. Five simple coaching questions used by Community Christian is one model:
1) How are you doing?
2) What’s going well?
3) What are your challenges?
4) What are you going to do about it?
5) What can I pray for?

9. Each of these churches has strong staff alignment to leadership development. Effective leadership development occurs when there is buy-in across each ministry towards leadership development. Many times staff say they are hired primarily to “execute” ministry, not develop others to do and lead ministry. Great churches have leadership development written as one of the key objectives of each staff member. Many have established goals of the number of leaders each department and staff are shooting for in a year. Positional reviews are done with staff reviewing their leadership development results each year. Churches have also worked hard at identifying where staff needs training in order to be successful in developing others. Plans are put in place to help everyone get better at developing others.

10. Great churches have metrics on their dashboards that tell them if they’re winning in developing leaders. These churches have found a way of measuring what matters. In the area of leadership development, here are several measures churches use: First, what percent of our staff have been raised up from within? This is a lagging measure telling the church how well they’ve been doing. Second, what percent of our leaders currently are apprenticing someone else? This is a leading indicator. It tells the church how many key leaders they will have in the next two years. It also indicates the ministries within the church that have effectively embraced leadership development. A third measure is looking at a church’s strategic plan asking the question, “How many leaders will we need at each level of our pipeline or pathway to accomplish our strategic plan and how many do we have now?” This gap analysis is tracked to see overall progress. This is often times broken down by department so each ministry area knows what they’re contributing to the plan and how they’re doing in the process.

Finally: when Churches regularly review their strategic framework and work on improving their intentionality, great results happen.
Developing leaders is one of the most critical needs of a growing multiplying church. If your church is interested in new ways of replication, multiplication and developing a customized model for leadership development, click on the button below for more information.

I Want to Learn More

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HUB
Leadership Development

How can you develop enough leaders to fulfill your dreams for ministry inside and outside the church?