

Church, would you share some of the principles that guide your ministry?

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Leadership  Network *Advance*



These Two Statements Changed My Ministry Almost 30 Years Ago

By Dave Travis

The call came from a frequent haranguer.

After discussion of a recent issue that had popped up within the leadership of the church, he began to bemoan the changes since he entered ministry in the late 1970s.

It was then that shared with him two of the fundamental understandings that changed my ministry.

It was 1990 when I stumbled on them.

Both came from people I respected.

While I had a nagging suspicion before then that something was off in my understanding of current church leadership, it wasn't until I got these two drilled into my head that I began the road to understanding.

I will admit that the statements need constant rethinking and reapplication as the environment changes, but that doesn't make them less relevant. They are just as explosive as then.

In fact, when I meet an unhappy Christian leader, a pastor or a key lay leader, I often find them in disagreement with the statements.

But if you agree with them, and keep rolling them around your head, they will change you.

The first statement came from Kennon Callahan: **“The day of the professional pastor is over. The day of the missionary pastor is here.”** That's a paraphrase but he gets the credit.

This thunderous opening to his book *Effective Church Leadership*, combines with this opener of the second chapter, “The day of the church culture is over. The day of the mission field has come.” ¹

Both describe what had already happened THEN and are still true today.

A mission field orientation and perspective on leadership has driven almost all of the real growth of congregations and Christ’s mission in the America’s since.

A missionary mindset instinctively realizes that we must approach our gospel practices differently in the context now. Imagine going to a country where there is no Christian heritage, memory or active group of believers. We would adapt our methods to meet the challenge.

No changes to the gospel. No changes to core understandings of faith. But deep changes in presentation and forms of connection with people.

Therefore, for a season, “seeker sensitive” approaches worked with boomers. It’s not that they don’t work now, it’s just that the nature of what a seeker is seeking has changed.

It is the reason that what worked “back then” isn’t as effective as it once was.

The mission must be outwardly focused on those not a part of the body yet. It is not focused on management or maintenance but on driving the mission forward to take new ground.

But there is a second statement. It is a harder statement as well for long time leaders to accept as well.

It came to me from the old man. ²

He said you need to agree with this statement. It applies to new leaders and those that remember the 1950s, 1940s, 1930s for that matter.

“Today is the most exciting time to be in ministry.”

“If that is your orientation,” he would say, “then you have a shot at finding a high degree of success in the future. If not, then you will spend your time living in another time.”

He would add comments and stories about how that individual leaders and pastors may be able to recreate some of the past and enjoy living there. But if one defined success by extending kingdom growth in more fruitful ways, those activities were going to lead to frustration.

I see this when leaders and congregants bemoan the changes in culture and our churches aching to go back to a previous era that they neglect great opportunities in front of them NOW.

Sometimes that desire to go back is driven by a decision that, in hindsight, looks pretty dumb when it came to a building design or location.

Sometimes it is a desire driven by changes in a community where they want to return to good old days where the church was larger in size and influence in the community.

When I give a presentation on cultural trends and show how some things have changed “for the worse” culturally with some things are “for the better” of flourishing people, most tend to focus on the “for the worse” and desire to see those auto correct. As if hoping would make it come true.

I rarely see good old days come back.

I do see congregations and their leaders creating new inroads and paths in much rougher and stranger countrysides. They finding satisfaction at a deep level knowing that while the good old days aren't coming back, they are making a difference. They are impacting their local communities and helping transform the people there to flourish.

This path cutting and experimentation also leads to failure sometimes. Not everything works.

But if your orientation, and that of your leadership team, is centered around the great new opportunities that your ministry can have in the future, that is more productive than trying to recreate the past.

While true that cycles of history can often come back around, the leadership stance and posture I think must be guided by the truisms above.

What do you think?

I am sure your ministry has been guided by a few principles as well. Would you share them with me?

Not the Bible verses per se, or your theological convictions that have shaped you, but perhaps the understandings that have helped guide you through your ministry to fruitfulness.

Just shoot them to me here at: Dave.travis@leadnet.org.

All of our programs at Leadership Network. Our Accelerators, our Church Implementation LAB, our LeaderGroups, have these understandings “baked in.” You should check them out.

1. Kennon Callahan, Effective Church Leadership. (insert Amazon link) While the book gets bogged down a bit midway, it is well worth finding a copy just for the first chapters

2. Lyle Schaller, my mentor for many years. One would be very wise to go back and read some of his books that, while written several decades ago are still applicable



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By Tim Nations, Director of Communication and Design

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- Learning from some of the most dynamic, multi-national businesses about how they’re developing high potential leaders.
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