

The plan is commonly presented as a strategy for ministry but must be constructed of the clear components mentioned above, or else the leader cannot logically defend why one apportioned sacrifice is required but another is not.

Bold bishops and conferences have already begun to walk courageously into this wilderness challenge with remarkable results. However, there is still much to learn about apportioning sacrifice that will allow the denomination to shift from institutional protection to missional fruitfulness. For example, we will need to become more proficient at communicating such plans and their intent, better at identifying appropriate sacrifices, and better at helping conferences vote for or, in other ways, pursue sacrifices that threaten the security of individuals where concerns for relationships still trump efforts of ministry. Many people in the church are still at the point of applauding sacrifice as a bold idea but then sabotage sacrifice when it comes too close – whether the sacrifice is connected to them or to others in the conference with whom they have a relationship.

2. Breaking dependence: entrepreneurialism and citizenship:

For several generations clergy and congregations were invited to see the annual conference and the general church as the provider of goods and services to meet their needs. The general church provided decisions, experts, programs and publications. The annual conference provided appointments, pension and health benefit administration, interventionist staff, and local program initiatives. Clergy and congregations were invited to see themselves as the consumers of the goods and services provided by the larger church. Peter Block points out that to be a consumer is a passive position.^{xxx} The consumer waits for the provider to exercise agency – to give the answer, define the action, provide the expertise, make something better. At a time when the church uses the language of entrepreneurialism to express the need for leaders and congregations to claim their own agency, there is still much to learn about breaking current dependencies and giving the work back to the people. We do not yet even see the many ways in which dependence on the denomination is offered to clergy and congregations and continues to be encouraged.

3. Moving from vital congregations to making disciples:

The effort to redirect resources to increase the number of vital congregations, as named by the *Call to Action*, is a correct proximate outcome. Vital congregations are resources necessary to the end outcome of making disciples. Efforts to produce growth, stem decline, and help congregations who have slipped below the threshold of change to die, are correct efforts. The current unsustainability of our denominational position must be addressed by redrawing the multiple baselines from which we currently operate.^{xxxi}

However, at some point in the next steps in the wilderness, we will need to begin the conversation about both being and making disciples as the primary and end purpose for which we exist. We need more learning conversation about what discipleship in this changed culture requires. At the present moment, we are asking a good number of congregations to move closer to making disciples while being led by people who do not themselves actively practice discipleship. To work only on proximate outcomes like vital congregations, without also beginning the conversation about the end outcome of discipleship, risks following a passion for “what” without the guiding “why.” Using the flashlight analogy from above, it risks following the flashlight but forgetting about the barn.

4. Metrics:

“A system gets what it measures,” is a fundamental postulate of organizations. What gets measured determines where the organization will set its priorities and give its attention. Since measurement and productivity are linked, organizations that do

not measure anything are easily sidetracked to produce nothing – to make nothing different. The efforts of moving to metrics – denominational statistics, conference dashboards – is an uncomfortable but necessary step toward realigning our congregational and leadership resources to the mission field where differences are to be made. However, our efforts are still young and there remains much for us to discover in terms of appropriate measures and effective use of those measurements.

At the moment the United Methodist Church has focused on the most easily quantifiable measures that, while easily measured, are soft indicators of either our proximate goals or our missional ends. The immediate value of these measures is that they require a refocusing of the attention of our leaders on issues of congregational vitality. There remain, however, at least three issues that the church will need to address that are related to our metrics.

The first is the issue of finding the appropriate measures. Organizational or professional metrics can be as counterproductive to the mission as they can be helpful to effectiveness. Young lawyers who are measured by their law firms using the metric of billable hours may serve the law office well in terms of revenue and can give evidence of commitment and productivity. However, the pressure of billable hours also makes the young lawyer less responsive to actually serving the clients' needs or short-circuits learning the fuller practice of law that goes beyond the minimum required by a revenue-based system. Physicians measured by revenue brought to the medical practice are commonly driven by the categories of procedures defined by medical insurance and depend on tests that are covered by insurance than by the health needs of the individual patient. There is evidence that the diagnostic skills of young doctors has declined because diagnosis is as much determined by the insurance payment as it is by the information presented by the patient. Like the professions of law and medicine, it is not yet clear that the measures now used in the church are appropriate to moving us toward our wanted goal of vital congregations or are derailing us back to institutional service.

The second issue is one shared by all non-profits that have to search for outcomes that are important, measurable (quantifiably and qualitatively), and sufficiently causal as to make the link between the effort expended with the results observed. Like all non-profits, learning to develop and follow missional outcomes is both challenging and difficult.

The third issue is one of motivation. What can be measured may not be that which motivates leaders in ministry. There is a direct link between motivation and measurements and the wrong measures easily destroy motivation. There is simply much more for us to learn here, more that will need experimentation and learning in the next part of our journey.

Conclusion: What Does Leadership in a Managerial System Require?

As noted at the beginning, this paper has a singular approach – that of organizational and systems theory. Nonetheless, the case can be made that such “secular” ideas and tools are supportive of spiritual leadership when used faithfully for purposes of mission. Corporate leaders bring the tools of their faith to their workplace when they seek a vision for their company, sit in prayer groups with their colleagues, and worry about the soul of their corporation. It is likewise appropriate for church leaders to bring the insights and practices of commerce and the sciences to be used in response to the call of the Spirit.

This paper has tried to offer a strong argument that the demands of leadership are different from the requirements of management. Along with differences in the skills and ideas needed for leadership, a difference of spirit is imperative. The leadership demands of the spirit require courage. Change is neither predictable nor controllable. Leadership requires walking into unknowns that feel dangerous. In a marvelous telling of the moment when the Israelites reached the edge of the Red Sea

with the Egyptians in pursuit, the Hebrew Midrash recounts how the leaders sat on the bank arguing who would step into the unrelenting waters first. Finally, impatient with the debate, Nashon, son of Amminadab, stepped out on his own and plunged into the water. It was only when Nashon appeared to be drowning that God instructed Moses to hold his rod over the sea and split it.^{xxxii} Courage is required of Nashon to jump into unparted waters, for Moses to lead people into a desert with no exit strategy, and for leaders to make discerning choices to identify and resource outcomes with no guarantee of success.

The demands of the spirit also require inquiry more than control. If the appropriate response to adaptive situations is learning over action, leaders must risk “not knowing” while leading. When paradigms shift, the only way to lead is by being clear about not knowing what to do and being willing to learn, to look again.

In fact, new learning, by definition, assumes risk and cannot be controlled. In the 1970s, during a time when there was concern over whether the human potential movement was providing experiences that were helping or damaging people, a research project was mounted to answer the question. Insightfully, one of the conclusions of the project was that damage and growth, discomfort and learning, are difficult to distinguish because learning inherently cannot be controlled and requires the dismantling of the known.^{xxxiii} Inquiry can only be risked; it cannot be controlled.

Finally, the demands of the spirit also require trust that allows room for God. Lone-ranger leadership—either singularly or in the guise of the genius with a thousand helpers—is an effort to provide answers and control. Having clear answers and being in clear control mean that there is no room, no empty space, kept open for the surprise of God’s presence. The notion of adaptive leadership (learning leadership) means leading without knowing where one is going or, more appropriately, without knowing where and how things will come out. To lead in such a way depends upon a trust in God that purpose will be given to the risk, meaning will be brought to the work. To live in such trust requires discernment of a future that is stronger with conviction than it is with proof. To lead only when the path is known allows no room for God, no space for the movement of the Spirit—which is where the changed life is encountered. It is not easy to move into the desert with no food, and it is no comfort that when manna *does* appear, it is so uncommon it has to be explained. The journey depends upon trust, and transformation by the hand of God depends upon the journey.

The story of the exodus serves us well in this moment of denominational and congregational change. It took both Moses and Aaron to get the people through. Moses embodied leadership. He sought out the big questions, spoke with God, and carried a vision so bright that his face shone even when he was not sure in which direction to walk. With him was Aaron who embodied management. He organized, made judgments, and focused on the next day’s trip rather than the final destination. Not only were both needed, they had to walk together closely. As one rabbi friend commented, suggesting a more contemporary Midrash, it was only when Moses (leadership) and Aaron (management) walked side-by-side that the people were faithful. When too far separated, with Moses on the mountaintop and Aaron below in the valley, confusion set in. Aaron organized the people to begin making the images that were breaking the very commandments that Moses was receiving.

What does it mean to be asked for leadership in a managerial institution? It means that as important as Aaron and his managerial strengths were, the people could not have found the Promised Land with him alone. It means that Moses needed to listen beyond the grumbling of the people that began forty-five days into a forty-year trip. It means giving attention to the purpose and destination—trusting in the presence of God.

Endnotes:

- ⁱ Edward Leroy Long, Jr., *Patterns of Polity* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 29.
- ⁱⁱ Long, 31.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Gil Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1998), 14-16.
- ^{iv} Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2003), 3-6.
- ^v Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1994) 14.
- ^{vi} Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001), 45-48.
- ^{vii} Craig Dykstra and James Hudnut-Beumler, "The National Organizational Structures of Protestant Denominations: An Invitation to a Conversation" in *The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism*, Coalter, Mulder, and Weeks, eds. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 307-331.
- ^{viii} Heifetz, 22.
- ^{ix} Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1972), 202-212.
- ^x John Scherer, "The Role of Chaos in the Creation of Change," *Creative Change* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1991), 19-20. The contrast between managerial problem solving and the need for leadership appropriately to address pain and possibility is treated at greater length in Rendle's *Leading Change in the Congregation*, 77-100.
- ^{xi} Michael Crichton, *The Lost World* (New York, NY: Ballantine Publishing Group, 1995).
- ^{xii} Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 84.
- ^{xiii} Edwards Deming, *Out of Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Center for Advanced Engineering Study, 1986), 23-24.
- ^{xiv} Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 96.
- ^{xv} William Sloane Coffin, *Credo* (Louisville, KY: John Know Press, 2004), 140-141.
- ^{xvi} Heifetz, p. 87.
- ^{xvii} Wally Armbruster, *A Bag of Noodles* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Press, 1972), 5.
- ^{xviii} C. Kirk Hadaway, *FACTs on Growth:2010* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2011).
- ^{xix} Hadaway., 6-9.
- ^{xx} Calvin Pava, "New Strategies of Systems Change: Reclaiming Nonsynoptic Methods," *Human Relations* 39, no. 7 (1986), 615-633. For further discussion of nonsynoptic planning see Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation*, 149-156.
- ^{xxi} Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leadership*, (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).
- ^{xxii} Gil Rendle, *Back to Zero: The Search to Rediscover the Methodist Movement* (Nashville: The Abingdon Press, 2011), 21-34.
- ^{xxiii} Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006).
- ^{xxiv} Brafman and Beckstrom, 161-178.
- ^{xxv} Stephen Denning, *The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations* (Boston: Butterworth Heinemann, 2001), 3-52.
- ^{xxvi} Rendle, *Back to Zero*, 53-67.
- ^{xxvii} Heifetz, 69-84.
- ^{xxviii} Penny Long Marler and Janet Maykus, "Is the Treatment the Cure? A Study of Participation in Pastoral Leader Peer Groups" (Austin Presbyterian Seminary, 2010).
- ^{xxix} Thomas Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum, *That Used to Be Us: How America Fell Behind in the World It Invented and How We Can Come Back*, (New York: Farrer, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 160.
- ^{xxx} Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008), 63-64. For further discussion of consumers and citizens see Rendle, *Back to Zero*, 31-34; 53-67.

^{xxxii} Lovett Weems, focus: *The Real Challenges That Face the United Methodist Church*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2011).

^{xxxiii} Reuven Hammer (translator), *The Classic Midrash: Tannaitic Commentaries on the Bible* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1995), 92.

^{xxxiiii} R. Kaplan, S. Obert, and W. VanBuskirk, "The Etiology of Encounter Group Casualties," *Human Relations*, 1980, 33, 131-148.

© Copyright 2012. Texas Methodist Foundation. Non-altered reproduction and distribution with appropriate attribution and/or citation is encouraged and authorized without prior consent from Texas Methodist Foundation. Please 800-933-5502 for reprints and, as a courtesy, to report use.