

Preparing Today for Tomorrow

“And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed”
(Acts 14:23).

The early church experienced dynamic growth because they knew how to prepare leaders. They sought out and appointed capable men to lead each church.

This lesson deals specifically with the ministry but can be applied to many areas of service, including the workplace.

We are at a critical point. We have been entrusted with a great responsibility to impact our world. We must prepare to become all we are called to be for our generation and the ones that follow. In order to build a strong, well-equipped, empowered church (or any organization), we must continually train new leaders and discover new talent. Wise leaders plan for the next generation. They continually train others to take their place. They see that their replacements have the best possible training to give them every opportunity for success. Given proper preparation, the carefully mentored successor can step in when the leader is no longer in that position. It has been rightfully said, “There is no success without a successor.”

The Apostle Paul is a good example of a leader who consistently disciplined successors. Paul sought out men with potential and prepared them to continue the ministry after he was gone. He made the following statement concerning training successors:

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

From the moment a leader takes a responsibility, he needs to begin looking for someone who can serve as his successor. He must realize that the privilege of filling a leadership role is not a lifetime appointment. Sometime he may be called upon to fill another, heavier, leadership responsibility. Will he be able to accept this responsibility if he has not trained a successor? At other times the leader reaches the age of retirement or simply a stage when he has done all he can do in that capacity.

Leaders often make one of two mistakes. They either stay too long or not long enough. Which one is most often the case? You are right, if you said that leaders often stay too long. A wise leader will know when to step down or to move on to the next level. This will be difficult if he has not been involved in training the next generation of leaders. He may feel, “Who else could lead better than I do?” This type of thinking is not progressive and does not encourage or develop strong leadership, church growth or expansion. Humility is a key in successful leadership transition.

Paul said, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:6-9).

Lyle Schaller said, "Leaders who stay too long do much more damage than those that don't stay long enough."

Hans Finzel in *"The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make"* suggested a number of reasons why leaders are afraid to let go. They include:

- 📖 **Job security.** (What am I going to do next?)
- 📖 **Resistance to change.** (I am comfortable where I am.)
- 📖 **Self-worth.** (My job is my whole life. To change positions will cause me to lose my identity.)
- 📖 **Lack of confidence in the successor.** (He can't do the job as well as I can.)
- 📖 **Fear of retirement.** (What will I do now? I will be useless.)
- 📖 **Loss of investment.** (I have invested a lot into this position and/or organization. I am receiving a lot of benefits here.)
- 📖 **Love for the people and the job.** (I love these people.) Remember, God loves them too and will do what is best.

The wastage of gifts and talents in the kingdom of God is quite surprising. Some older ministers do not have any idea of what to do with the younger men. The older men sometimes feel threatened. The younger men may feel frustrated and overlooked. As a result, the young men may divide the church and begin to lead through manipulation. This is a sad picture. It is not being suggested that we should only train younger men. Many of the people that we develop may be older than we are. Age is not the significant thing here, but preparing the next generation of leaders.

"There are many churches which pour cold water on any life which begins to bubble where they are not bubbling. Any time a person shows initiative, they knock the effort on the head, and the person retreats back into mediocrity . . . True life will always break out in new initiatives. The only place where there is no initiative is in the cemetery, where the occupants stay peacefully in their quiet 'hotel rooms.' We should not make our churches function like cemeteries." (*Wanted: Servant Leaders* by Gottfried Osei-Mensah)

David was a tremendous leader. When he was old, he made a prayer to the Lord. "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come" (Psalms 71:17-18).

Like David, we must be willing to train the next generation and allow them to continue what has been started.

Eastwood Anaba stated, “Most of all our spiritual giants have been doing the same things for years without any promotion in the things of God. The reason is that they have not trained anyone to take their present position. God does not promote a man who has no replacement to occupy his present position. Our condition as a church is therefore miserable. No one is going up. Those who are beneath are being suppressed and those who are above are being overburdened. We are in a state of crisis—a generation of effective ministers can easily fade away without replacement.” (*Productivity Vitamins*)

Anaba’s statement applies directly to the church, but fits in many area of leadership.

Another principle is “you have to give up to go up.” Obviously, a leader cannot remain on the same level if he wants to go to a higher level. He cannot move to the next level until he has trained someone to do what he is doing. It has been said, “The road to the next level is always uphill.” Training the next generation is not always easy, but it is crucial for the ongoing success of any endeavor.

“Would to God that we would learn this . . . today! Our national leaders (*in some countries*) want to stay in office until they drop dead, and when they drop dead nobody has been prepared to take over from them. It is the same in the church—perhaps our church leaders have copied this pattern from our national leaders. . . . The church today needs leaders who are able to disciple younger leaders and prepare them, not just as leaders of tomorrow, but as God’s servants to serve today.” (*Wanted: Servant Leaders* by Gottfried Osei-Mensah. Italics mine.)

Study Questions

1. Who does the most damage, the leader who stays too long or the one who does not stay long enough? _____

2. Name some reasons leaders are afraid to let go of positions. _____
