



TRAINING REPLACEMENT LEADERS

J.J. Turner, Ph.D. ©

When I was a novice preacher years ago trying out for preaching jobs, two questions were always asked during the interviews:

- (1) Can you teach a leadership training class?
- (2) Can you direct a pew packer's class for children?

Both of these questions have gone the way of rotary phones. Yet, in my opinion these two areas are still very important in local congregations. It is the leadership area that I want to give a few minutes of attention to in this article.

The cry today that there is a leadership crisis in all areas of life, especially in the church, is so common that it doesn't raise an eyebrow or get much attention. The church is where it is today because of leadership and will be where it is tomorrow because of leadership. As I travel among churches conducting leadership programs the signs are obvious: leadership training is rare and nonexistent in many congregations. An elder recently said to me, "I don't what we are going to do in the future. Our present leaders are retiring, getting too old and losing interest. What are we going to do to make sure we have dynamic, biblical leaders in the church of tomorrow?" My quick answer was, "We must train replacement leaders!"



The Bible exemplifies the need for replacement leaders. Imagine what would have happened in Israel if Joshua had not been prepared to take over the leadership reins from Moses. What would have happened if Elisha had not filled the shoes of Elijah? We would not have had 12 Apostles if Matthias had not been prepared to take Judas' place. I think it is safe to say that Paul mentored Timothy to become a preacher so that when Paul was no longer able to preach, he and other prepared men would be able to continue preaching the Gospel. What if Alexander Campbell had not replaced Thomas Campbell?

Paul in his writings to Timothy gave us a sage principle relative to training leaders: "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 2:2,3). In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul instructs the leaders to equip the church for ministry, which obviously includes leadership roles (cf. Ephesians 4:11-16).

From where will our future elders, deacons, preachers, Bible class teachers and other leaders come? In baseball when a major league team gets in trouble they many times will call up a player who has been developing in the minor leagues. In theater understudies are ready to step in when a starring actor can't perform. Most businesses have a game plan for replacing their CEOs when he retires or something happens to him. Why have we neglected this vital area in the church?



Many men have been thrust into leadership roles in the church without little or no formal preparation. An elder once told me, "I really didn't want to serve as an elder but as you know you need at least two men to have an eldership, so I agreed." Add to this the sad fact that many men grasp leadership roles who are not really prepared for them and you have major reasons for engaging in training replacement leader.

How to Tell if Your Congregation Needs a Leadership Training Program

One of the ways to prepare replacement leaders is to conduct an ongoing leadership training program. The first step is to make an assessment of you present leadership training. Take a few minutes and answer the following questions as they relate to your congregation. Place **Y** for yes, **N** for no or **U** for unsure to indicate your answer:

__1. Do you presently have an ongoing leadership training program?

__2. Do you presently have an ongoing leadership program for different categories of leaders?

__3. Do you have replacement leaders already trained?

__4. Do you have yearly refresher courses for leadership training?

__5. Are your present leaders overloaded with work assignments?

__6. Is leadership training a priority for the congregation?



__7. Do present leaders need more training?

__8. Do you have difficulty in getting new leaders?

__9. Is your present leadership functioning as an effective team effort?

__10. Do YOU need or desire additional leadership training?

__11. Is your congregation growing numerically, spiritually and financially?

__12. Are your leadership ranks getting smaller?

A careful evaluation of your answers to these 12 questions may reveal that you need to give serious consideration to having a leadership training program in your congregation.

Focus of Leadership Training

In order to have a successful and relevant leadership training program the following areas should be considered in developing the program. First, biblically identify the areas of leadership that need to be filled in the church. This will include elders, deacons, preachers, teachers, song leaders and other ministry leaders. What are the qualifications according to the Bible for each leadership role? This necessitates a study of the Bible for answers. Also, there must be an emphasis on growing in Bible knowledge. Leaders ignorant of the Bible cannot lead successfully (cf. Hoses 4:6-8).



Second, the skills need for the leadership job must be clearly defined. Does the potential leader already have the skills to do the assigned task? If so, to what degree does he need improvement? How will the candidate be helped to develop the necessary skills? Will it require mentoring? How will you evaluate whether or not the skill level has been achieved?

Third, the most important area of leadership training is in the area of character. Suppose the potential leaders has in-depth Bible knowledge and can “speak with the tongues of men and angels” but has serious character flaws, shall we appoint him to a leadership role based on efficiency in two of the three major categories? I say no. Character is the heart and soul of all true leadership that is approved by God. It’s the old adage “What you are speaks so loudly that I can’t hear what you are saying.” All leadership is tied to influence. A leader with great knowledge and outstanding skills will not be followed when his numerous character deficits are obvious.

While it is very unlikely that a leader’s personality will change because it was set in his youth, his character, however, can be changed. This is why a vital part of leadership training must be devoted to character. The core character trait of a Christian leader is the “attitude of Christ” in every situation (Philippines 2:4-8). A leader’s character must exemplify the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-26). He must be pursuing the greatest of all virtues, which is love (1 Corinthians 13:13).



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The alarm has sounded. We must take leadership training seriously; especially as it applies to training replacement leaders. God forbid that your present leadership team would be killed in an accident, as some teams have, how would you replace them? Do you have replacement leaders in training?