THE SENIOR PASTOR’S GUIDE TO
LEADING VOLUNTEERS
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A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

THE SENIOR PASTOR’S GUIDE TO LEADING VOLUNTEERS
Church members may not understand all you do, but if you’re a senior pastor, you’re a part of a fraternity. A highly committed, over-worked, eternity-minded fraternity of people who lead a local church.

It’s rewarding to be a pastor. But make no mistake about it, the job is hard. Peter Drucker, the late leadership guru, said that the four hardest jobs in America are:

• The President of the United States
• A university president
• A CEO of a hospital
• A pastor of a local church

That’s a pretty amazing list. But when you dive into what pastors do each day, it starts to make sense.

**THERE ARE INCREDIBLE DEMANDS ON YOUR TIME.**

Being a senior pastor is not a 9 to 5 job. From time to time, God wakes you up in the middle of the night with someone on your heart or an idea to reach people far from God. And while you’re usually not angry when God disturbs your schedule, let’s be honest, the Holy Spirit isn’t always convenient.

On top of that, it’s often church people who want more and more of your time, sometimes disrespecting any semblance of boundaries. People pull you in many different directions, and that puts considerable demands on your schedule. And your family.

**YOU DEAL WITH CONSTANT CRITICISM AND CONFLICT.**

Rev. Dr. Ken Fong, senior pastor at Evergreen Baptist Church in Rosemead, California says, “Being a pastor is like death by a thousand paper cuts.”

Maybe it’s the deacons. Maybe it’s a disgruntled church member. Or maybe it’s team members with different ideologies or visions for ministry. Church conflicts can take on a mind of their own, maybe even fueled by the enemy. It’s serious business.

**THE JOB DESCRIPTION IS DIVERSE.**

I’m not sure the Apostle Paul would be qualified to be the pastor at a 50-person church based on some of the job descriptions I’ve seen.

One day you’re doing sermon prep, the next day you’re counseling and visiting, and the next day you’re leading a staff. You’re expected to be a masterful communicator,
empathetic counselor, and brilliant leader with the skill of a politician thrown in for good luck. At times, it’s hard to tell what’s really most important.

**YOU OFTEN FEEL ALONE.**

One of the biggest reasons being a senior pastor is so tough is because it can be a lonely role.

Sermon preparation is typically done alone. You go into an office and come out with a word from the Lord. It’s a private process. If you’re not careful, you’ll insulate yourself from people in your church, even from the people you’re leading.

**YOU CARRY THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD.**

As a senior pastor, you’re doing work that has eternal significance. It’s not just your job and your paycheck, it’s your ministry and your calling. You’re the shepherd of a flock of people. With families and souls.

It’s up to you to champion the mission and vision of the church. You’ve got to make sure the church is being a good steward and has money to grow. You’ve got to lead a team of others, developing them from scratch if need be. People are looking to you to lead them, even when they aren’t there.

**BUT DESPITE ALL OF THE CHALLENGES, YOU LOVE WHAT YOU DO.**

You’re called to lead.

You’re committed to lead.

You are determined to preach the gospel, pray for people, invite people to church and build leaders.

And you’re going to make a difference.

Being a pastor means your ultimate reward is in heaven. But while you’re here on earth, we want you to know we stand with you. We’re here to equip you with practical tools to help you lead your church to healthy growth. We’re here to support, encourage and resource you as you lead.

This book will help you lead people, one of the most difficult tasks of pastoral leadership. I’m going to give you practical ideas and tools to lead people around you, whether they officially work for your church or serve in a volunteer capacity.

So if you’re ready to take your leadership to the next level, read on.
LEADING VOLUNTEERS
In the year 33 or 34 AD, Jesus looked at his group of close followers and issued a final instruction we now call The Great Commission. “Go into all the world,” he told this group of people, who as Jews believed the world to be divided into two groups of people – Jews, who were God’s chosen people, and Gentiles, who were not. Taking the Gospel to the entire world required a serious commitment and the abandonment of a national prejudice that had existed for centuries.

Considering most people did not travel more than 60 miles from their birthplace in the first century, Jesus’ command was bold and borderline impossible. But they had followed Jesus all over Galilee, including places like Samaria, where they would have never visited on their own.

“Go and make disciples,” Jesus commanded them. The word “Christian” hadn’t been invented yet, but these men knew the meaning of the word *disciple*. In their context, a disciple was a student, a protégé, and a follower.

The call to make disciples is a call to reproduce. To take what has been entrusted to you and pass it on to someone else. To take what you have learned and teach it to someone else. Today, the Great Commission still compels us to go and make disciples.


In the church world, discipleship is not about getting work out of volunteers or raising money to meet the budget. It’s about helping them listen to the voice of God and responding in obedience.

Every weekend, it takes hundreds of people to create environments that lead people from where they are to where God wants them to be. Your church, like many others, could not function well without volunteers. No matter how many people you have on staff (or how few), volunteers do the majority of the ministry.

One of the main jobs of a pastor is to equip the people in the church for the work of the ministry. This isn’t just a strategy for getting things done in your church; it’s a Biblical mandate.

Ephesians 4:12 presents a compulsion to develop others who can do ministry. Our job is to “prepare people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built.” If we do not have a prepared people, then that’s a reflection on our leadership. We lead ministry by leading people.
We must teach people to discover their spiritual gifts, and use their specific skills and passions to build up the body of Christ. We need to call out gifts in people and show them how they can use those gifts to build the body of Christ.

This isn’t a volunteer recruitment strategy. It’s a part of helping someone follow Jesus.

We do not develop people because we simply need their skills or talents. We develop people because it’s an act of discipleship and we must obey God. This is much larger than a strategy for getting things done; it’s our spiritual responsibility as a pastor and leader.

In the end, volunteers will accomplish more than paid staff. To borrow a maritime metaphor—every ship needs a captain, but the ship won’t go far without sailors.

Andrew Carnegie said, “Take away my people, but leave my factories and soon grass will grow on the factory floors...Take away my factories, but leave my people and soon we will have a new and better factory.”

Carnegie understood something that church leaders must understand...we can’t use people, we must develop them for the work of the ministry and the advancement of the Gospel.

Your church needs volunteers and volunteer leaders if you want to accomplish your mission.

Another reason volunteer development is so important is that the habits of your volunteers will become the culture of your church. If your volunteers give, then you’ll have a generous church. If your volunteers invite people, then you will have an evangelistic church. There’s a trickle down effect that cannot be denied. If you want to have a healthy church, you need a healthy volunteer base.

Whether you preach twice a week, lead the staff, or visit the sick, there’s something else you must do...you must develop volunteers and leaders.
TRAIN AND DEVELOP YOUR VOLUNTEERS

Inviting volunteers to be a part of a team is step one, but you must not stop there. Once volunteers have signed up, they need to be developed. Signing people up and then leaving them alone is a sure-fire way to burn them out or never realize their potential. Developing people takes time. While signing up new volunteers is quick, developing them is going to take time. Be careful not to rush this.

Jeff Kapusta, pastor of Lifepoint Church in Wilmington, North Carolina, writes:

Plato once said, “The greater part of instruction is being reminded of the things you already know.”

One of the hardest lessons that I have learned in my years as a leader is the “Principle of the Runway.” The principle says this, “just because someone has the ability to fly doesn’t ensure they have enough runway to get off the ground.” Let me explain...

It is estimated that a 747 with a full capacity load needs approximately 7,500-10,000 feet of runway to achieve take off. Anything less can be a disaster.

One of the qualities that most leaders have is the ability to spot talent in the lives of others. Often times, we see someone who has tremendous potential and therefore we fast-track them into a position of leadership. Let me give you a WARNING: talent will cause some people to appear larger than life!

Once fast-tracked, it doesn’t take long until the potential they displayed begins to wane, the passion begins to fade, their character may come into question, and they simply crash and burn. We tend to blame them for not delivering on their responsibilities when the reality is that they were set up to fail from the beginning.

The problem is not the person but the runway.

Many casualties in ministry could’ve been avoided if we had simply extended the runway or proving ground before we elevate them in ministry. I believe this is why Paul tells Timothy that leaders should be closely examined and pass a time of testing before they are put into play. (1 Tim. 3)

Slow down. Lengthen the runway. Watch people fly.

Jeff is absolutely right. In order to develop people, you need to give them time.
LOWER THE BAR

If you want to create a volunteer culture, you’re going to have to lower the bar. I know churches talk about excellence and want to do things well, but in order to have a volunteer culture, you’ve got to understand that everybody isn’t a professional. We will always have needs to offer the service of professionals, but our default cannot be “hire someone.” It must be “develop someone.” Yes, there will be times when the services of a professional or a consultant are required, but this should be the exception rather than the rule.

To work with volunteers, we will ultimately have to agree on a standard that is somewhat-less-than perfect, but greater than unacceptable. Some have called this “good enough.” Maybe you need to show videos that are edited in iMovie instead of Final Cut Pro.

Our ultimate goal is not to produce the most excellent product, but to create disciples. It’s a win when someone uses their gifts and talents to build up the body of Christ. When we focus on quality to the exclusion of people, we miss the mark in ministry.

GIVE FREEDOM

If you want to develop people, not just do or delegate, you must learn to give people opportunity and authority, within a box. You’ve got to be willing to let people make decisions, because nobody wants to be micromanaged.

The CEO of GE, Jeff Immelt, in an interview with Fast Company said, “The boundaries are commitment, passion, trust, and teamwork. Within those guidelines, there’s plenty of freedom. But no one can cross those four boundaries.”

Mr. Immelt is talking about giving authority within some parameters, and this is a helpful volunteer development technique. When you put a volunteer in charge of something, be clear about what resources they have, timetables and parameters, but let them operate freely within those lines.
BE A COACH

If you want to develop people, you must learn to be a coach, not a critic. A critic says, “I didn’t like that.” A coach says, “Here’s why this didn’t work the way you probably hoped.” A critic says to the worship pastor, “I didn’t like that song.” A coach says, “That was a great song, but I’m not sure it fit at the beginning of the worship set because...” A critic says, “That wasn’t a good sermon.” A coach says, “You might have lost the audience in the middle because it was information heavy...I think people would have benefited from a story there.”

Critics tend to be ignored, while people generally crave coaching. Even professional athletes at the top of their game appreciate a good coach!

Coaches provide honest, immediate, and consistent feedback. Volunteers in your church want to know how they are doing. They will appreciate feedback and coaching, if it’s done in a helpful manner.

Coaches are clear about the expectations. From time to time, volunteers will do the wrong things because the expectations weren’t clear. They weren’t being malicious or trying to make life harder for you...they just weren’t clear about their role. This is why every volunteer in your church should have a written job description. This can be as simple as three bullet points on a sheet of paper. In fact, it NEEDS to be short.

Every volunteer should have a written job description that contains three items:

- A short description of their role
- The necessary time commitment
- The contact information for their “supervisor”

One of the most valuable resources we offer our members is a sample job description for a volunteer. This editable document can be easily customized by your church. Use a simple job description to get your volunteers on the same page.

Beyond providing clarity to all of your volunteers, you also need a system to provide training and encouragement. Every ministry area should have regular training built into their systems and schedules.
Here are some training ideas:

- Take key volunteers, not just staff, to church leadership conferences. Many volunteers will take time off from work and pay their own way.

- Record a monthly leadership podcast with ministry-specific training.

- Record a training video, post it on YouTube, and send the link to everyone.

- Do an online chat or conference call just for your volunteers. Don’t make them come to a meeting...give them valuable information while they’re in the comforts of their own homes.

- Have a quarterly leadership event. Details on what we do are coming later in this resource. Use this event to inspire, train and challenge your volunteers and leaders.

- Take a volunteer with you to a meeting with another leader. Not only can you spend time with them, they will learn with you. Connecting people to your contacts is an incredible way to appreciate and develop people.

- Take your team to another church service, perhaps on a Sunday night. Evaluate what you see and let people suggest ideas for improvement. You’ll build relationships with people and improve your ministry at the same time.

- Bring in someone from another church or an expert in a field to talk to all the volunteers on your team. Most volunteers on your team want to get better at what they do.

- Share Church Fuel resources like Master Classes and the team training videos with your key leaders. Let them know they can have access to some of the same training the staff is going through.

It’s always worth it to invest in your volunteers, because they will create the culture in your church. There’s a trickle-down-effect that cannot be denied.
ENCOURAGE AND PASTOR YOUR VOLUNTEERS

One of the biggest mistakes pastors and leaders make in dealing with volunteers is giving them tasks and responsibilities, but failing to encourage and pastor them. As a pastor, your job is to disciple your people. This means that you need to pastor and shepherd them. You’ve got to rely on your volunteers, but you can’t use and abuse them.

Discipleship happens during the development process, and it’s important for you to embrace your role as a pastor. Whether it’s praying for your volunteers, encouraging them to share prayer requests with each other, inviting people over to your house, or asking about family or work, you must take the time to get involved in the lives of your people.

In this section, I want to give you four ways that you can pastor and encourage volunteers in your ministry area.

1. Appreciation

As a lead pastor, one of the most effective things I do is appreciate people for their hard work and commitment. Because I’m a fairly driven person, this doesn’t come easy to me. I must be intentional about doing this. Every Monday, I write three thank you notes to people in our church. Sometimes, I ask others on staff for suggestions, because they see so much more than I do. These notes are short and sweet, but they are powerful. I’ve even gotten thank you notes for thank you notes!

The senior pastor needs to lead the way in appreciating people, but this also needs to be a crucial task for everyone on staff at a church. Encourage your staff to write thank you notes, or take some time in an upcoming staff meeting to write a ton of encouraging notes.
Here’s a sample of what you could write:

Dear Phil,

Rebecca was bragging on you in the office today and I just wanted to say thanks for all your hard work on Sunday in Kids Check-In. You really are helping lead people from where they are to where God wants them to be, and we’re all grateful.

Michael

2. Recognition

Recognition is another way to encourage and pastor your volunteers. While appreciation is typically private, recognition is typically public. When you recognize people for their hard work and commitment in front of others, it really means a lot. Chances are, you’ve got a bunch of volunteers in your church that don’t do what they do for the recognition, but they would really benefit from the encouragement. Volunteering at church shouldn’t be a thankless job, and don’t let “your reward is in heaven” be an excuse for not recognizing people.

One way you can recognize people is to mention them in your sermons. Publically thank and recognize people throughout the calendar year by dropping “by the way” comments into your messages. You can do this same thing at special events.

We used to keep the names of our leaders literally before us all of the time. In our main office area, we had a magnetic board with all of our volunteer’s names written on little cards. Not only do we see how ministries are organized, we can look at people’s names. This is also a great visual prayer list for you and your staff.

3. Encouragement

As a pastor, it’s my responsibility to encourage people to do good works. Calling out the potential in people is one of the most meaningful things I can do. Whenever I see God-given potential in people, I need to speak that into their lives.

When you see potential in people in your church, let them know what you see.
Ultimately, leaders won’t stay motivated by completing tasks—they need to see the vision accomplished. They need to be reminded that what they are doing is pushing the ball down the field and scoring touchdowns.

When you tell people that they have what it takes, and when you connect what they are doing to the big picture mission of the church, you’re encouraging people in their walk with Christ. Sharing Bible passages and praying for your people is a way that you can pastor your people.

4. Information

Another important way that you can pastor and develop people is to give them information. Volunteers in your church should have access to a deeper level of information. They should hear things before the rest of the congregation. And in a way, this insider information is a form of appreciation and development.

When something big is on the horizon, tell your leaders first. In fact, the more important the decision, the longer the communication highway should be. When we have something really important on the horizon at our church, we typically follow a communication pattern that looks like this:

a. Talk to our staff.
b. Invite the appropriate key leaders to dessert at the pastor’s house.
c. Share the information with all of our volunteers at the Leadership Summit (more on this environment later).
d. Share the information with the congregation on Sunday.
e. Share the information with the world via email, blogs and Twitter.

We also provide “insider information” to all of our members in the form of a quarterly membership update. This email contains a more detailed level of information than we typically provide to the congregation.

TWO ENVIRONMENTS TO HELP YOU LEAD VOLUNTEERS

If you’re like most church leaders, you want to provide encouragement, training, and information to your volunteers, but you struggle to find the appropriate time. You don’t want to busy up people’s schedules with training meetings, but there are important things you need to communicate.
We learned that the best time to communicate and train volunteers is in short spurts on Sunday morning, when they are already in the building to serve. At 9:15 every Sunday morning (45 minutes before our first service at 10am), we ask every volunteer serving that morning to meet with their team leader for a volunteer **huddle**. This expectation is clearly communicated to all volunteers, and it’s written on the volunteer job description. Even those volunteers who serve during the second service attend this huddle.

The team leader—sometimes it’s a staff member and sometimes it’s a lead volunteer—takes about 10-15 minutes to provide quick information and training on the spot. The meeting always follows the same agenda, built around the acronym **VIP**.

**VISION** – why we do what we do

- Remind the team why we do what we do
- Share specific success stories
- Allow team members to share observations that lead them to believe we are accomplishing our mission
- Remember, everything we do matters!

**INFORMATION** – what you need to know

- Communicate any changes
- Share any information from coaches or staff
- Ask if people have any questions

Remember, communication is a form of appreciation!

**PRAYER** – ask God to bless the entire day

- Pray for the services
- Pray for the Pastor and the message
- Pray for the guests who are en route
- Pray for any specific needs of those on the team

The Huddle has proven to be a valuable source of training. It gives our leaders a platform to talk about the vision of the church, communicate necessary information, and spend a few minutes with everyone on the team.
The second leadership environment that you should have is a quarterly leadership community event. At Oak Leaf Church, we called it a *Leadership Summit*.

It wasn’t a very creative name, but it served the purpose. We asked every volunteer from every ministry to come together on a Sunday night four times a year.

I announced this from the stage and our staff invites their people via email. From time to time, we sent postcard reminders to all volunteers in our database. A Leadership Summit is part vision, part worship, part training, and part appreciation. It combines all the elements we’re talking about in this resource. As the pastor, this was, hands down, my favorite event. Our people loved it.

We began every leadership summit by giving away a special award called the Leafy. The Leafy is a custom-created, trophy-style award that we give to a volunteer who has gone over and above the call in serving Jesus through the church. Every time we gave out the award, the recipient received a standing ovation from the other volunteers. We could give this award to everyone, but we don’t let that keep us from giving it to someone. In a way, our recognition of one person made the entire volunteer team feel appreciated and loved. I’ve been to people’s homes and seen these awards proudly displayed on fireplace mantles.

We spent some time worshipping Jesus, singing some of our favorite songs and focusing on God’s goodness. There’s nothing like a room full of committed volunteers singing amazing songs of worship to God. We always participated in communion. Since this is a gathering of the church body and committed leaders, it was simple to explain and meaningful to implement.

I shared insider information or challenged our people. It was at the leadership summit where I first unveiled the location of our second campus, announced that we’d purchased a facility, and where we announced our leadership transition. We shared this big information with this group of people first because they deserved to know first. It’s de-motivating to consider yourself a leader and hear huge information in the weekend service.

A LEADERSHIP SUMMIT IS PART VISION, PART WORSHIP, PART TRAINING, AND PART APPRECIATION
One time, I was on staff at a church, and I learned about a huge ministry initiative during a Sunday morning service. I didn’t feel valued at all—guests and attenders knew as much as I did, and I was a part of the leadership team.

From time to time, we brought in a guest speaker to challenge our volunteers. These were friends in ministry, who shared timely words of encouragement with our people.

Other churches graciously helped us with childcare for these events (we would return the favor later) so that all of our children’s ministry volunteers could participate. Our staff pulled double and triple duty that evening, serving as greeters and running the production, so that our people could participate freely.

These two environments—the weekly Huddle and the quarterly Leadership Summit—have proved to be invaluable tools for appreciating, informing, and developing volunteer leaders. While the exact times and formats might not work in your setting, perhaps the ideas can be adapted for your church.
LEADING YOURSELF
The second hardest people I lead are my kids.

Why is it that I can inspire other people to take massive action, but I can’t get my kids to be nice to each other? Or clean their rooms?

But the hardest person I lead is myself.

I want to be a great leader. Well-informed. Well-respected. Confident and trusted.

But too many times, I fall short.

I ask people to do what I don’t do well myself, often expecting what I don’t model.

We live in a two-story house in Atlanta, with all the kids bedrooms upstairs. We have a rule in our house that we don’t yell from the upstairs to the downstairs, or vice versa. If one of the kids needs something, they are supposed to walk in the other room and ask like a civilized person.

As you can imagine, this rule is more of a guideline really. There’s way more yelling than I care to admit.

And one more than one occasion, I’ve yelled back…”HEY…DON’T YELL FROM THE UPSTAIRS TO THE DOWNSTAIRS.”

Here I am, expecting what I’m not modeling. Trying to get others to do the right thing while doing the wrong thing in the process.

What kind of example is that? Why in the world would I try to keep by kids from a specific behavior by exhibiting that very same behavior.

The Apostle Paul said, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”

I get that, because I live that.
That’s why the hardest person I will ever lead is myself. Not a paid staff. Not a group of volunteers. Not a committee or a team.

Me.

Leading others doesn’t start with others at all. It doesn’t start by clarifying expectations, setting goals, asking questions, or casting vision.

It starts by working hard on myself.

It starts with getting my own house in order.

Now the good news is there are more resources than ever before to help me become a better leader.

And if you want to lead at a higher level, these resources are available to you.

Simon Sinek can spend years researching, outlining, and writing an incredible leadership book called *Leaders Eat Last*. But I can purchase a copy for less than $20 and get free shipping. What took years to write and thousands of dollars to create, I can get for next to nothing. And there are hundreds of other well-researched, well-written, top-quality leadership books. Many of these represent people’s life work. For the cost of a couple of meals, you can purchase valuable content that took thousands of hours to create.

A great leader like Carey Nieuwhof can spend hours arranging guests, conducting interviews and putting together a leadership podcast. With a couple of clicks, I can access this incredible resource for free. He’s done all this work and I can listen at no cost. This is amazing. And that’s just one of the amazing podcasts available to you for free on the internet.

Then there are conferences like Leadercast and the Global Leadership Summit. Months of event planning and production go into an event. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent on content and I can access it all for a few hundred bucks. Other people have done all the hard work, putting together a program you could never produce on your own, and you can attend.

If you want to become a better leader, help is out there. It’s not hidden. It’s in plain sight.
T**O MUCH NOISE**

Ironically, it’s the plethora of resources that make it tough to take action.

The sheer volume of leadership books out there might lead you to avoid the bookstore all together. The amount of information in podcasts and videos might confuse more than clarify. How in the world could a person who is already busy make time for more ideas. You’re not even executing the ideas you already have, why spend time searching for more?

Hundreds of years ago, information was confined to the educated, enlightened and powerful. But today, it’s online, accessible from the average phone. Books are affordable. Podcasts are free. And conferences are everywhere.

While this is an opportunity to some, it’s a barrier to others.

Too many choices mean you choose nothing. Too many plans mean you follow none.

So despite the books, conferences, courses, coaches and networks, you put your head down and keep doing the same thing you’re doing.

It’s not that you don’t know there are better plans out there…it’s that you don’t have time to care.

About seven years ago, I came up with a simple plan to cut through the noise. At least for me. You see, I was feeling the same thing you’re feeling today when you think about leadership. I was suffering from information overload.

I went to a leadership conference and came home with pages of notes and took little action. I had finished a few more leadership books and posted the notes to my website. Leadership had become a field of study to me.

I was consuming information, but I wasn’t doing anything with it. I was learning, but I wasn’t applying or growing. And frankly, I grew tired of it all.

So I did something that seemed really simple at the time and something that’s morphed into a simple exercise I now share with others. I created a personal leadership development plan.
CREATING A PERSONAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PLAN

This conference I attended? I went because I had friends going and they sent an email with a discount code.

Those books I read? I read because they were best-sellers or recommended by someone.

Every resource was a must-read or a must-attend, because I didn’t have focus.

I was simply responding to learning opportunities not charting an intentional course to a specific definition. Essentially, I was eating random food from the buffet and I was getting fat on leadership.

So I decided to change that.

I sat down with a sheet of paper and brainstormed the answer to one question: In what area do I want to become a better leader?

What was my specific leadership development goal? How did I want to get better? In what way?

See, becoming a better leader is generic and theoretical. You need a more specific goal than that.

Do you want to get better at casting vision, leading meetings, or coaching your team? All of those things take leadership but they are really different skill sets. You’re not going to get better at every aspect of leadership at the same time, so don’t try.

When you try to work on leadership, every resource in the world with a halfway decent value proposition looks appealing. But when you focus your leadership development goal on a specific outcome, you shrink the playing field down to something that’s manageable.

So the first step in leading yourself is creating a plan to get better as a leader. And the first step in creating a plan is setting some specific leadership development goals.

From there, you intentionally choose resources that help you accomplish your goals.

If your goal is to become a better communicator, you can intentionally choose the conference or learning event that focuses on the outcome. Ignore the half-off emails and invites from everyone else for the time being...that’s sideways. Instead, choose the opportunity that will take you where you want to go.
If your goal is to become a better team builder, you focus on the books that deal with personalities, team meetings and relationship dynamics. For now, ignore the popular generic events and the best-selling books. Put your focus on your goal and choose resources that get you where you want to go.

Once I got clear on how I wanted to improve as a leader, I was ready to intentionally choose resources that matched.

- The conference to attend, not necessarily one that is popular but the one that looks like it would be the most helpful.

- The books to read, not necessarily the ones that are promoted the best, but the ones that will teach me what I need to know.

- A coaching group to join, not because a friend was in the group, but because the mentor is someone who could help me lead.

These decisions made it easier for me to say no to more generic opportunities, but more importantly, they served as a guide for my goals. It was an intentional plan, not a reactionary one.

I sketched this first draft on a legal pad, but I’ve since developed this into a much prettier one page PDF. It’s a simple design that helps you make intentional choices.

This PDF is one of the 70+ documents available to Church Fuel One members in the Resource Library. You can learn more and join at churchfuel.com/one.

Start by writing down your leadership development goals for the next year. Then make intentional decisions about where to go, what to read, who to follow and what to put on your schedule. Put it all down on one sheet of paper and let it guide your progress throughout the next year.

Here are some things you can include on your one-page plan:

**Podcasts.** If you want to improve as a preacher, decide to listen to one podcast a week. Go ahead and write down the name of the podcast and the people you’re going to learn from. There are podcasts on every topic imaginable, but
decide what you’re going to do right now.

Books. Ask friends for recommendations, but decide what books you’re going to read. Books are my favorite leadership development tools because the bar is often higher. Reputable authors and books are well-researched and go through a vetting process. Blogs are great, but books are better. Decide how many you’re going to read and list their titles. Assign each book to a season of the year or a month on the calendar. Then order them all and place them on your desk.

Conferences. As a leader, you should attend one or two conferences every year. I know they’re expensive and travel is required, but they’re worth it. Look at the next 12 months and decide what you’re going to attend. Put it on your calendar and make travel reservations. Buy your conference tickets and book your hotel room. I promise that something will come up at the church that will make it a “bad time to be gone,” but stick to your plan.

Conversations. Great leaders understand that there’s a wealth of information and information to be gained from relationships. Are there people you want to connect with or learn from as a part of your leadership development? Write their names down and make a plan to get them coffee or buy them lunch. Maybe you can put together an informal meeting of a small group of leaders to talk about a specific leadership topic. These conversations or informal groups can be a tremendous asset to you.

Coaching. “Picking people’s brains” is great, but some of the best leaders I know pay money to be a part of a formal coaching program. There’s something about paying a coach and joining other people on a similar process. Whether it’s online or in person, there are tons of great coaching groups available to you. Don’t be a victim of broke thinking and say you can’t afford this. Find a way, because a great education is worth it.

Your leadership development plan is unique to you. If you’re not a reader, don’t load it up with books. If you learn best in conference environments, lean heavily there. Write a real plan for becoming a better leader.

Your plan isn’t about creating a well-rounded diet...it’s about intentionally choosing who to follow based on your specific goals and needs.

Before you lead another retreat, cast a bigger vision, or clarify expectations for your team, start by creating a leadership development plan that will help you lead the
CLOSING THOUGHTS
LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH IS REALLY DISCIPLESHIP.

It’s helping people discover their gifts and passions and then using them to build up the body of Christ and advance the mission of the church. Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck say, “The primary purpose for our leadership mandate is to make known the glory of God by leading others to flourish in God’s design.”

That means when we equip others in the church to do the work of the ministry, we’re leading and helping others lead.

That means when we help clarify roles and responsibilities, we’re helping to clarify people’s focus in the Kingdom of God.

That means when we get intentional about being a good steward of our own time, we’re putting ourselves into a position to be used by God at a deeper and higher level.

Leadership in the church really is like the tide. When the leaders get better, they pull everything up.

That’s why leadership, even though it may not always feel urgent, really is one of the most important things you can do.

Here’s to leadership.

Michael Lukaszewski
Founder and CEO of Church Fuel
FOR MORE INFORMATION
ON HOW TO DEVELOP LEADERS
IN A GROWING CHURCH, VISIT
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