



Who to Empower and Who to Avoid

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Every church plant has a lead guy.

And, in planting a church the lead guy quickly finds himself doing too many things, most of which he is not skilled at and generally makes a mess of. So, it is imperative for the planter to develop leaders before he pursues masses of people. The selection of an inner circle of trusted leaders and emerging leaders help to ensure that the church does not continually bottleneck at the leader and thereby slow or retard progress of the church and cripple the overworked leader.

This inner circle of key leaders should be chosen by the planter for their skill, trustworthiness, and loyalty. They should not be rushed into official offices too quickly (i.e. deacons and elders) but instead tested in their work and later approved for the office if they qualify. In selecting these people you must be careful to avoid the selecting of those imposters who intentionally or unintentionally appear like fellow leaders.

Needy people disguise themselves as potential leaders by making a lot of time available to the church and volunteering for every task. However, their motives are often selfish as they serve to be noticed, appreciated, validated and recognized. They also serve so that they can be connected to other people and have their many relational needs met. If you allow needy people to lead you will spend all of your time mending their hurts and listening to their feelings and be sidetracked from developing leaders who can shepherd people like them.

Insecure people disguise themselves as potential leaders by seeking out friendships with the primary influencing leaders and hanging close to the center of power. However, if you begin to push them out of the center of influence in your church because you sense that they are too easily wounded or serving because they like having power, influence, and a title you will discover that they can quickly turn their loyalties against you. If you allow an insecure person to lead you will find that they are often emotionally unstable and continually blame their failures on you and others. They will continually speak to others about how busy they are and how much they are doing so that they can garner attention from other people.

Nice people disguise themselves as leaders by having lots of people like them and enjoy their company. Nice people rarely assert themselves and are often nominated by others for positions of influence. Nice people occasionally commit to service, but usually fail to follow through on commitments and are not dependable. However, they remain very nice and everyone loves them even though they do not do anything of note. If you allow nice people to lead you will find yourself spending lots of time having long and pleasant conversations with them that never result in anything being accomplished.

Disgruntled people disguise themselves as potential key leaders because they have lots of ideas and tremendous passion. They will tell the planter how awful their last church experience was and why he is so much more talented and wiser. However, their anger and gossip should tip you off to their immaturity and you should expect that the knife they put in the back of their last pastor will soon find its way into your flesh.

Seasoned people disguise themselves as potential leaders by talking about all of their experience and success over many years of ministry. However, this can be a serious detriment to your work because if they are not humble and teachable they think they know exactly what to do and begin to impose all of their ministry philosophy and ideology upon your new church. If you allow proud seasoned people to lead you will dislike what they create and how they train emerging leaders and likely have to deconstruct and rebuild their work that will waste a lot of time and energy for you and them.

Church kids (meaning people who were raised in a church and actually really enjoyed it) disguise themselves as potential leaders by talking about how much they love God, love church, and want to be used. They will likely tell you that they want to work in your church plant because they want to be used by God and reach lost people for Christ. However, if they have failed to do anything significant to that point in their many years of opportunity you can safely assume that they are not leaders. If you allow a church kid to lead you will likely spend a great deal of time trying to convince them that your vision is tenable and that because the high has quickly worn off they need to keep going and not return to the safe and comfortable church life that they left. After a while you grow weary and so will they, and they will either return to their safe church life or simply sit in your pew and treat your church like the one they left.

Dreamers disguise themselves as leaders by continually speculating about an idealistic church with lots of passion, big words, and convincing rhetoric. However, they tend to live in the world of dreamy ideas and rarely have the discipline and courage to do anything concrete with those ideas. If you allow a dreamer to lead you will spend lots of time meeting with them and listening to them speak to you about all the things other people should do while you grow frustrated because you realize that they will never do any of those things themselves.

Flaky people disguise themselves as leaders by continually nominating themselves for a task and then failing to do it. They will then appear repentant and sad, begging for another chance to do something. If you give them another chance this pattern will continue until you kill them, they leave, or Jesus returns. If you allow a flaky person to lead (and you may be tempted to do this because you wrongly believe that the responsibility will make them more committed and dependable) you will continually find yourself checking up on them and trying to pick up their messes at the last minute.

Wolves disguise themselves as leaders by carrying themselves with confidence and expertise. However, they will naturally create divisive alliances and cause people's loyalties to shift to them. They may do this by being overt and having lots of leaders to their home to be won over, or they may do this covertly by dropping items of gossip and undermining the leader's authority and respect. If you allow a wolf to lead you will split your church before it is healthy enough to survive and you may find yourself out of work.

If I had it to do over again, I would pray for and actively seek competent, mature, and loyal leaders in three areas to complement my own. In every plant, there must be a leader/communicator who can envision the future and lead others into it by clearly and convincingly teaching from the Scriptures. This leader/communicator often lives in the world of ideas and is a generalist who does not want to run a particular area of ministry, but instead influence all areas of ministry in a church. This leader/communicator also often enjoys developing leaders more than counseling and shepherding people and is primarily responsible for fundraising.

In addition, I would prayerfully seek an administrator who can oversee the planning, implementing, managing, and reviewing of the ministry philosophy and theology of the church. While the leader/communicator envisions the future, the administrator envisions the present and the steps necessary to walk into the future in such practical areas as facilities, budgets, communication flow, technology, volunteer coordination, organizational structure and the like.

I would also seek a worship/arts leader who could craft experiences and oversee the worship service events. Since this person is the second most visible person in the church they should have sound theology, admirable character, and be fully devoted to the church planter and his philosophy of ministry. The worship arts leader will need some management skill to coordinate volunteers, musical skill to develop new material and inspire fellow artists, and have an understanding of technology such as projection, sound engineering and the like.

I would also seek a shepherding/groups person to coordinate the care and training of the people coming into the church. Whereas the leader/communicator spends most of his time developing leaders, the shepherding/groups leader should be developing and nurturing the people who come into the church. Ideally, this position would be filled by a husband and wife team who worked well in tandem together on marital issues, and also separately with specific gender related issues, particularly those of a sexual nature. This couple would need to be tremendously mature, hold a confidence, be able to emotionally withstand the demands of their position, and be able to train others to teach Bible studies and counsel those in need.

The leader/communicator is then free to live in the world of ideas, finances, leadership development, and vision.

The administrator is free to live in the world of details, specifics, and planning.

The worship/arts leader is free to live in the world of creativity and experience.

And, the shepherding/groups person is free to live in the world of people and life transformation.

Ideally, under each of these leaders would then be developed emerging leaders who could grow the church in wisdom, depth, influence, and size, eventually creating the very elders and deacons qualified to occupy their offices and carry the new work into a long and stable future.