
Church Revitalization - Building Credibility

Audio Resource Notes

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Introduction

It is essential for a leader to build credibility in preparation for leading change. Today's subject is Building Credibility as a leader.

Review of the Church Revitalization Change Process

Church Revitalization requires leading change in your church. Below is the nine step *Church Revitalization Change Process*, that I have developed based on the research of church revitalization experts and change author John Kotter. We will focus on one step in the change process at each meeting.

The Church Revitalization Change Process:

1. Start with Prayer, Confession, and Trust in God
2. Prepare for Pain and Suffering
3. Create Urgency by Defining Reality
4. Build Credibility
5. Build a New Dominant Coalition
6. Develop a Vision
7. Communicate the Vision
8. Implement Changes
9. Normalize the Changes

Note that Steps 1-7 are all preparatory steps before actually making changes in Step 8, and normalizing the changes in Step 9. Many church leaders start at step 6, 7, or 8, and the change meets heavy resistance because they have not done the preparatory steps.

Note also that the steps are not always linear. For example you are always building credibility (step 4) and always praying, confessing and trusting God (Step 1).

What is the Timeline for the Change Process?

You are learning the steps in the Church Revitalization Change Process faster than you will be able to implement them. You should anticipate the change process lasting **anywhere from two to five years**, and possibly longer. Each church setting is different, with some churches being more ready for change than others. If your church faces an imminent crisis, the leadership will be more open to try significant changes quickly, than if your church is in a long, slow decline.

Four Criteria for Credibility

“What we found in our investigation of admired leadership qualities is that more than anything, people want to follow leaders who are credible. Credibility is the foundation of leadership.”¹

- James Kouzes and Barry Posner, Leadership Researchers

“Credibility is the foundation of leadership.”

It is *essential* for a leader to build credibility in preparation for leading change.

Kouzes and Posner’s research indicates three criteria which determine a leader’s credibility, and I have added a fourth based on the example of Biblical leaders:

- **Trustworthiness:** We must believe “that their word can be trusted.”
- **Expertise:** We must believe “that they have the knowledge and skill to lead.”
- **Dynamism:** We must believe “that they’re personally passionate and enthusiastic about the work that they’re doing.”²
- **Evidence of God’s Work in and through them:** the Lord sovereignly establishes leaders and gives them credibility through his work in their lives.

David & Leadership Credibility (Psalm 78:70-72)

These four criteria are on display in the story of David.

*“He chose David his servant
and took him from the sheep pens;
from tending the sheep he brought him
to be the shepherd of his people Jacob,
of Israel his inheritance.
And David shepherded them with **integrity of heart**;
with skillful hands he led them.”*

Psalm 78:70-72 (NIV)

The Divine Component (Psalm 78:70-71)

God chose David and raised him up as a leader to do his work with his people.

“He chose David...and took him...he brought him to be the shepherd...”

The Human Component (Psalm 78:72)

David carried out the leadership role that God had given him to do, with two main features:

1. “David shepherded them **with integrity of heart**”
2. “**with skillful hands** he led them”
3. It should also be noted that David displayed **dynamism** in his leadership, as evidenced in many stories about him and the Psalms that he authored.

David’s leadership credibility was established by God’s sovereign work in his life and by his personal integrity, skill, and passion. David lost leadership credibility when he lacked integrity and led foolishly in his sin with Bathsheba.

How can a Church Leader Build Credibility?

1. Ask the Lord to Establish your Credibility

¹ James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2007), 37.

² Ibid.

The Lord can establish your credibility through many means. His basic principle is that He exalts those who are *humble, servants, and faithful with little* (Luke 19:17, 22:26, 1 Peter 5:6).

2. Do the “Expected” Tasks well

Do the tasks that your congregation expects a pastor to do. Some of these tasks will be chaplaincy work rather than visionary leadership work, but they will help you build credibility for leading change. The list below will vary from church to church, but all churches “expect” their pastor to do some things such as:

- a. Leading groups or studies
- b. Attending committee meetings
- c. Visitation
- d. Other tasks unique to your church

3. Preach Quality Sermons

You are perceived to have expertise as a pastor when you preach consistently good sermons. Even if you are not naturally “charismatic” in your preaching style, you can learn to be more dynamic and interesting. I suggest three main rules for preaching:

1. Do be Biblical.
2. Do be Spiritual.
3. Don’t be Boring.

Tip: I am amazed at how many sermons are Biblically sound, but not logical or engaging. Your sermon needs to take people on a logical journey that flows out of the text and into their lives. You engage people by raising the tension presented in the passage and then showing how the text resolves the tension.

Tip: If you have never watched a recording of yourself preaching, do so, and ask yourself if you would attend your church a second time, based on your preaching. Spend some time critiquing your message and delivery. Even better, ask a pastor who you think is a good preacher to review and kindly critique your message and delivery. If you are humble and can take it, you will learn a lot!!

Note: Heritage Seminary offers a *Graduate Certificate in Biblical Preaching*. There are many testimonies by pastors and churches about how their preaching has been strengthened significantly through this program.

4. Create (Early) Wins

Paul Borden interviewed pastors who had lead revitalization in their churches, and asked them what they did when they first came to the church. From these interviews, he suggests thirteen areas where a pastor can have some early wins. Although many of us are not in our first year at a church, we can still learn from Borden’s list.

Let’s spend some time discussing these areas together:

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| 1. Learn the congregation | <i>Stats, personal contacts, previous pastors</i> |
| 2. Learn the community | <i>Stats, personal contacts, walk/drive around</i> |
| 3. Develop a first-year plan | <i>Include some of items 1-13 in your plan</i> |
| 4. Gather people | <i>Who? How?</i> |
| 5. Create big events | <i>Pre-evangelism and evangelism events</i> |

6. Improve curb appeal	<i>What? How? \$?</i>
7. Energize worship	<i>Preaching, worship, service order, other</i>
8. Communicate (Vision)	<i>Preaching, one-on-one, groups</i>
9. Recruit leaders	<i>Who? How?</i>
10. Be present in the community	<i>Connect in positive ways</i>
11. Evangelize	<i>Who? How?</i>
12. Address Money	<i>Money issues – systems, reports, spending</i>
13. Pray ³	<i>Prayer for the church’s vision</i>

Borden notes that a pastor should “**select three, four, or five things to do, driven by the ministry context in which you find yourself.**”⁴ The pastor will need to choose the areas that are most needed, and most attainable.

However, Borden reports that, “In all the interviews pastors identified one common denominator during their first year: building congregational attendance.” Focusing on a few of the fifteen areas listed above can help you achieve this goal of building congregational attendance.

For further reading: *Make or Break Your Church in 365 Days* by Paul Borden, 49-72.

³ Ibid., 52-70.

⁴ Paul Borden, *Make or Break Your Church in 365 Days* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 52.

Appendix: Leaders Who Built Credibility in the Bible

Leadership credibility was built in the Bible using divine and human activities.

*“He chose David his servant
and took him from the sheep pens;
from tending the sheep he brought him
to be the shepherd of his people Jacob,
of Israel his inheritance.
And David shepherded them with integrity of heart;
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Psalm 78:70-72 (NIV)

Paul built personal credibility by going up to Jerusalem to meet with the “Influential” leaders of the church: Peter, James and John (Galatians 2:1-10).

“Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.”

Galatians 2:1-10

Paul built Epaphras’ credibility by sharing about his labour in the gospel on behalf of his fellows Colossians (Colossians 4:12-13).

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.”

Colossians 4:12-13

Biblical Figures who developed leadership credibility:

- Moses
- Joshua
- Ruth
- Gideon
- David
- Solomon
- Peter
- Paul
- Mark
- Timothy