

10 Mistakes New Pastors Make in Their First Year

Recently, I had the [chance to sit down with new Mariners Church Senior Pastor, Eric Geiger](#) and capture his story of transition for the [My Ministry Breakthrough podcast](#). Springing off of our conversation, here are ten mistakes that too many pastors make during their first year in a new role:

1. **Attempting too much.** There will likely be a long list of needed changes to culture and process waiting as you step into this new role. It is equally as likely that much of that list can be done over time and not all at once. Do not mistake activity for ministry. Plans are important, but your greatest influence will come not from the doing as a pastor, but from the being.
2. **Attempting too little.** In this season, building relationships become a critical part of establishing your leadership. Meetings are important but so is making some needed and incremental changes. You will set the tone for the whole staff in your first year of work. It could be easy to mistake your desire to spend too much time getting to know them as instruction away from effective progress. Remember, it only takes 21 days to form a habit and your team will follow your lead quickly. Year two should not be spent breaking bad habits over fueling new initiatives.
3. **Forgetting the power of questions.** The wisest leaders enter most of their meetings in year-one prepared with a set of thought-out and instructive questions. There is wisdom in placing a priority in *asking, then listening for something to learn* – instead of – *telling, then expecting for something to happen*. Also, remember it is often in the follow-up questions in which the most discovery usually occurs.
4. **Never leaving your last church.** It is natural, and often necessary, to remain connected with good friends and leaders of the church you just left. You will miss some of the processes you helped to develop and some of your favorite places to eat or unwind. However, an unhealthy longing for “what was” will likely keep you and your current church from “what will be.” Using the phrase “at (fill in the church name) we...” too often is a good indicator it’s time to leave mentally as much as you already have physically.
5. **Trying to prove your organizational worth** to the formal and informal leaders of the church. PowerPoint presentations and Gantt charts are useful and certainly make a new leader look smart. But, what needs to be proven – what is of most Kingdom value to those leaders – is your dependence on the Lord. It will be your commitment to His Word, to walking in the Spirit and to sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ that brings the longest lasting impact to the organization.
6. **Equating time in the pulpit as equal to time with the people.** Balance the time spent preaching and preparing to preach with time spent listening and getting to know your congregation, and especially its leaders. Learning who they are and what they struggle with will help to move your preaching past assumptions and simple anecdotes to applying the truth of scripture to the real challenges your people are facing.
7. **Forgetting to help your family grieve the loss of friends and ministry they’ve just left.** Holding the two tensions Eric talked about is as critical for your family as it is for you as a leader. The best thing you can help them to do is celebrate the impact of the last

season. Like stopping to watch a mid-summer sunset, gather your family to tell the stories of what God has done. Stop and frame a picture from this last season, then reframe from what is lost to what is learned. Think as much as about what we have learned as what we have loved. Help yourself and your family to look back, intentionally and briefly, like a slingshot to looking forward hopefully and expectantly.

8. **Spending extra time in the office instead of at home.** In a new pastorate, there will be much to do at work. However, there will always be a lot to do. Ministry activity expands directly with the amount of time available. Be stingy with your time at home. Disappoint your congregation with how much you are not disappointing your family. It is more valuable to your ministry to care for your family and lead them to Christ in this season of transition than to be at every meeting or event someone else has deemed to be critically important.
9. **Believing everything the search consultant or committee told you.** It is not that they lied or deliberately misled you – for the most part. Keep in mind that their perception of reality around your new position and their assessment of the condition of the congregation was directly connected to who did the reporting and to their hopes of the outcomes. In some cases, it was their job to present a prettier picture than reality. Therefore do not be discouraged, and remember that there will always be more problems than were first reported and that there are equally as many victories than were ever celebrated. In this new season, walk wisely, with great anticipation, and without assumption.
10. **Forgetting to take care of yourself.** Establish a rhythm of health that is sustainable. Work out. Eat healthy, because you will be eating out a lot. Guard your off days as if your life depended on it. Understand the meaning of Sabbath and protect time away from study, meetings and to-do lists. Double down on a hobby or activity that creates room for your mind to breathe and focus on the Lordship of Christ in your life. Your inability to rest or set aside work for a Sabbath is a better statement of your theology than a sermon ever will be.

What mistakes have you made or seen made in the first year of a new ministry role?

[Hear Eric Geiger's leadership transition story here.](#)