

Deal with Problems in Your Church by Speaking of Current Reality and Future Possibility

A couple weeks ago, I wrote a post called [“Assessing the State of Your Church and How it Got There.”](#) I looked at a few business and leadership books and then considered some ways their advice might apply to a local church. I concluded with this word of warning:

Don't miss the importance of learning “what time it is” for a church and how it has progressed to this point.

If the church culture has stifled honest conversations about the current realities and challenges, people will begin to shield the leader from “grim facts” for fear of being criticized or penalized for telling the truth. Then, once the “brutal facts” are ignored, the organization suffers and, sometimes, dies.

Of course, the next question is: *Okay, now what? If I've prayerfully and honestly assessed the state of my church and how it got here, how do I move forward with my congregation?*

I would sum up the next steps in two phrases: **tell the truth** and **face the future**.

Tell the Truth

Helping others see the urgency of the situation is important in communicating what must change.

In the business world, John Kotter says the biggest mistake leaders make as they seek to implement changes in an organization is to move forward without establishing a sense of urgency. In *How the Mighty Fall*, Jim Collins warns that simply communicating facts is not enough to stimulate change. In declining organizations, he writes,

“there is a tendency to discount or explain away negative data rather than presume something is wrong with the company; leaders highlight and amplify external praise and publicity.”

A Burning Platform

How should communication of the state of the organization take place?

Kotter recommends a “burning platform.” This refers to the ability of a leader to communicate the truth that complacency in the organization is the real danger, not change. People in the organization will not sense this to be true until they realize they are on a “burning platform” in which fire starts on the floor beneath their feet, spreads around them, and eventually forces them away from the status quo.

In other words, **the leader must communicate the true state of the organization** and help others view the reality of the present situation and the dangers on the horizon if the organization fails to make the proper changes. The pastor has more of a “burning platform” than any mere business or secular organization. We believe in the reality of hell, the urgency of evangelism, and the success of God’s mission through His Spirit.

Some business books go so far as to recommend a new leader “create” a crisis, if necessary, in order to implement changes quickly. For example, Kotter believes since crises are always rising, a real leader should “create artificial crises” and make use of them rather than waiting for a true crisis to come along. Such a strategy is unacceptable for the Christian leader. The Christian who understands the reality of the current situation must communicate the truth; manufacturing crises for the sake of implementing change is unethical and manipulative.

Face the Future

A leader who knows “what time it is” organizationally will not only diagnose the current situation and communicate the “brutal facts,” but the leader will also envision the future of the organization and take measures to pursue the path forward.

A Plan of Action

Prescription is vital, which is why a plan of action must be set forth. If the leader focuses only on the urgency of the situation, people are likely to fall into despair rather than move forward with an optimistic outlook. Description of the bad and prescription of the solution are both necessary.

The timing of implementing changes is important. Reggie McNeal warns: “The right issue tackled at the wrong time faces certain defeat.” However, most of the time, the right issue is determined by the trail the leader is blazing toward the future.

Be Clear

The vision of the future must be clear, which is why leaders who know “what time it is” organizationally will be relentless in the pursuit of clarity, both for themselves and the people they lead. Without clarity regarding changes, people will disagree on the direction, perhaps due to confusion or questions about the necessity of the decisions.

Church consultant Will Mancini synthesizes several definitions of clarity:

It means being free from anything that obscures, blocks, pollutes, or darkens. Being clear as a leader means being simple, understandable, and exact. The leader helps others see and understand reality better. Leaders constantly bring the most important things to light: current reality and future possibility, what God says about it and what we need to do about it.

Clarity must include not only the win, but also the path to the envisioned future. The Christian leader must know “what time it is” organizationally and be able to communicate the present reality and the path toward to the desired future.

> [Read more from Trevin.](#)