

Lasting Changes Require this One Thing

If you want to make changes to your church, you need to ask yourself this question:

“Am I willing to give the rest of my life to this church?”

Making a significant change in your church is at *least* a five-year job, if not a 10-year commitment. If you’re not willing to stay for the necessary time, don’t make the changes.

A few years ago, I was talking with a pastor about some changes he wanted to make in his church. I asked him, “How long are you willing to stay?”

“Oh, I’m willing to make a commitment for at least six months.”

Do you know what my advice to this pastor was? If that’s all the time you’re willing to stay, don’t even get started with the changes. Nothing will happen in six months. It’s a waste of time and resources.

If you get in the middle of making significant changes in your congregation and then bail, it’s like leaving a patient on the operating table. A doctor would never quit in the middle of taking out someone’s appendix. He’d get sued. It’s not much better when you quit in the middle of making significant changes in your church.

In fact, you’re just messing up someone else’s ministry. It’s the next pastor who will suffer from your lack of commitment. I’ve seen too many hot-shot pastors come to new churches and make big changes. Then, when a bigger congregation calls him somewhere new, he bolts. At that point, the church has to deal with a big mess. When the next pastor comes along, the church won’t even consider making the changes needed to grow.

If you want to make lasting changes in your church, you need to:

Make a public commitment to stay through change

Any pastor looking to make big changes in a church needs to start with a public commitment to stay throughout the process. I did this at the first Saddleback service in 1980. I told everyone that I was going to give at least 40 years of my life to the church. I wanted people to know that the church wasn’t a fly-by-night operation. If people know you’re not leaving, they are much more likely to put some skin in the game themselves and to stick with you through the changes.

Having coached pastors for decades, I’ve noticed that when the pastor leaves, the problems stay, but if the pastor stays, the problems leave.

Be patient

If your church has plateaued in recent years, it’ll take even longer to make changes. A church

that hasn't grown in size for 10 years has a problem. If you're patient as a leader, you can turn the church around. But it won't happen overnight. The longer your church has plateaued, the more time it'll take to implement important changes.

Any issues your church has didn't develop overnight. You can't fix them overnight, either. Since you've already publicly committed to being at the church for the long haul, take your time.

I once asked a pilot how he turns around a big plane in the air. He told me that it takes time to make a turn in a big plane. "You can make almost a 90-degree turn in the air, and the plane can handle it, but your passengers will go crazy." He said even a 45-degree turn is rough on passengers, but they don't usually notice a 30-degree turn.

That's why it's so important that you're willing to stay at the church for an extended period. You can make a bunch of small yet significant changes over a long period of time. People won't even notice. It's when you try to make the changes quickly, in a herky-jerky motion, that people get upset and may not support your plans.

Slow the pace of change and be patient; success takes time.

Just ask Hank Aaron.

On baseball's opening day in 1954, Milwaukee Braves rookie Hank Aaron didn't get a single hit in five trips to the plate. He could have quit that day. But five outs didn't define Hank Aaron. He batted another 12,359 times during his career, and he eventually broke Babe Ruth's career home run record.

It's not how you start; it's how you finish. Your church won't have the ministry fruitfulness you want unless you're committed to staying the course to implement necessary changes and being patient in the process.

> [Read more from Rick.](#)

Want to know more about change in your church? [Talk with an Auxano Navigator.](#)