

The Success Factor - Leverage Today's Wins to Solve Tomorrow's Problems

Below is a new weekly series posting content from one of the most innovative content sources in the church world: SUMS Remix Book Summaries for church leaders. SUMS Remix takes a practical problem in the church and looks at it with three solutions; and each solution is taken from a different book. As a church leader you get to scan relevant books based on practical tools and solutions to real ministry problems, not just by the cover of the book. Each post will have the edition number which shows the year and what number it is in the overall sequence. (SUMS provides 26 editions per year, delivered every other week to your inbox).

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Our church dreams more about where we have been than where God is leading us.

Have you ever looked around to realize that your church might be living today by focusing on yesterday?

Many churches long for the past, dreaming about the "good old days." When faced with questions that are not easily answered, or walking through times of trial and doubt, churches, like people, often want things to be the way they used to be.

The problem is, the past has gone. While we may look back and respect it, and maybe even at times revere it, we cannot live in the past, especially when circumstances demand answers for the future.

If you are interested in learning how to lead your church away from the past in order to focus on what God has ahead, consider this solution:

Solution #2: Cultivate solutions by celebrating current successes.

THE QUICK SUMMARY

In *Missional Renaissance*, Reggie McNeal shows three significant shifts in thinking and behavior that churches need to make in order to allow leaders to chart a missional course forward. These shifts are:

- from an internal to an external focus, ending the church as exclusive social club model;
- from running programs and ministries to developing people as its core activity; and
- from professional leadership to leadership that is shared by everyone in the community.

With in-depth discussions of the "what" and the "how" of transitioning to being a missional church, readers will be equipped to move into what McNeal sees as the most viable future for Christianity.

A SIMPLE SOLUTION

As a leader, do you find more passion in learning about the past – events, activities, and people? Or, do you find passion in looking forward into the future, and wondering what events and activities of tomorrow and beyond are going to be brought about by what kind of people?

As in many leadership questions, there is no right or wrong answer, and elements of both passions described above are helpful to any leader. However, in terms of the life of the church, there is a subtle danger in a focus on past heroes and the times when they lived, the actions they led, and the events they are fondly remembered for.

While keeping a firm grip on the importance and foundations of the past, leaders must reach forward and lead their churches to what the people of God must do.

Typical church leadership spends a lot of time keeping the past alive. Missional movement leaders appreciate the past, but mine the past for lessons on how to forge ahead.

When we come together for our gatherings, if all our heroes are the ones who have gone before us and all our God stories are about yesteryear, we're in trouble.

The traditional church celebrates the history of the saints, but missional movements yearn for journalists who can tell us what God is up to today.

The model for this kind of leadership is found in the role of apostles and prophets in the New Testament. They witnessed and passed along God news that was good news. The journalists tied their stories to the work of God before, but they allowed the new developments to shape their understanding of God's work in the world.

Journalists take us to places they've already visited. They uncover stories beneath the stories and inform us of what's going on. They shape our perceptions by what they have seen, experienced, and uncovered. They move us from where we are into a new reality.

Our discovery of what He is up to becomes the faith story that is prologue to our future.

- Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*

A NEXT STEP

At your next leadership team meeting, spend 10 minutes of discussion, asking your team members to call to mind current individuals and events that your church holds in high regard. Write the names and events on a chart tablet. Beside each, write a phrase or sentence describing the importance of the individual or event.

Now, spend 45 minutes asking your team in broad and generic terms to list the qualities revealed through the character of these individuals or results of these events that will propel your church into the greatest ministry period of its existence. Along with each item, list one to two immediate actions that it will take to make the list become a reality.

As a team, choose the most pressing individual description or event listed, designate a team leader, and prayerfully commission that leader to create the future.

In another leadership team meeting, review the following questions to help equip your team members as “journalists” who will uncover the real talk of conversations going on in the hallways and parking lots of your church.

1. *What do you enjoy doing?* Helps people see how God might use them in their everyday lives.
2. *Where do you see God at work right now?* Helps people see God in their family, their community, the office – wherever.
3. *What would you like to see God doing in your life over the next six to 12 months? How can we help?* Helps communicate the importance of the individual now, not in the past.
4. *How would you like to serve other people? How can we help?* Helps focus on serving others, emphasizing outside the church.
5. *How can we pray for you?* Helps demonstrate personal care and concern.

Ask your team members to use the five questions above in conversations with at least seven key volunteer leaders they work with in the next month. After a month of conversations, dedicate one hour of a team meeting to share the highlights of the conversations.

Consider asking key volunteer leaders to duplicate the conversations with at least five team members they work with. After they have had a chance to have these conversations, debrief the leaders and note key phrases that are repeated. Bring these to the next team meeting to add to the conversations already started.

Designate an individual to maintain this five question process in a digital document that can be continually updated and accessed by team leaders. From time to time, reference this document in team discussions to ensure that the voices of the present are being heard – and acted on.

Taken from SUMS Remix 22-2, published September 2015.

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