The Plug and Play Problem of Church Leadership

The following is a brief excerpt from Mike Breen's latest book *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, which came out at the beginning of May 2012.

Imagine that it's a Tuesday morning, and that the staff of your church has gathered for its weekly staff meeting. Staff members discuss the weekend service and whether it delivered the message and experience they hoped it would. They discuss the attendance numbers; small group numbers and effectiveness; budget, buildings, and cash flow. You know, the normal staff-meeting routine.

Then, there's a soft but decisive knock on the door. Someone says, "Come in!"

Into the room, dressed in normal clothes, step Peter, Paul, James, Priscilla, Timothy, and Lydia. (Obviously, we're in a hypothetical situation here.) They introduce themselves and say that the Lord sent them to your church to serve in any way they can. They ask, "What can we do? We don't want to be on the stage or anything. You're doing the preaching/teaching thing really well. But we'll do anything else you need. Just tell us what you'd like."

A stunned silence comes over the staff — after all, this is a strange situation. But soon enough, the staff members snap out of it.

"Uhh, well, OK. Well, how many of you are there? Six? Well, let's see. Could three of you be small group leaders? We're looking to start some new small groups, and clearly you'd be great at that. Peter, James, Paul, could you do that?

"Hmmm . . . you know, we lost the person who heads up our First Impressions team a month ago, and it has been a bit lackluster. It has lost the punch it used to have. You know it's important that people have a strong impression of our church within the first 15 seconds when they come to the service. Priscilla, do you mind heading that up?

"Timothy, we could sure use another usher, you look like you could handle that. Lastly, Lydia, I hear you play a mean bass and can sing too. We're down a bass player and would love to have you in the band. Maybe you can even fill in and lead worship from time to time. Are you up for that?"

This is called plug-and-play. This is about having various positions we need filled in the machine of our churches and plugging people into those roles. Now don't get me wrong: there are always going to be logistical needs when the scattered church gathers. That's reality, and we need to attend to that and do it well.

But does anyone really think this is where a church should be using Peter, James, Paul, Priscilla, Timothy, and Lydia? Would this be the most effective use of their time and energy given the skill sets they have? Of course not.

There's a leadership myth out there that programs that need leaders create leaders in and of themselves. But this hypothetical example shows us how systems can fall short.

Maybe we can think about it this way: If your church were suddenly given 250 missional leaders, would you have any idea what to do with them? Or would you just plug-and-play them in what you are currently doing?

Read more from Mike [here](#).