

Two Dangers of Copying Ministry Practices from Others

Here is a typical scenario in local church ministry...

In the spring, while at a conference, Danny attends a breakout session on small groups. Though the breakout session leader spoke passionately about the “why” of small groups and the importance of a solid ministry philosophy beneath the surface, the vast majority of the questions from those in attendance were about small group practice: How many people in each group? How often do you launch new groups? How often does leader training occur and in what format? What are the leaders called? How does...? Danny feverishly takes some notes on small group practice, notes he plans to implement when he returns to his church.

Several months later, Danny has lunch with a respected pastor of a church he has looked up to. He is really grateful for the time, and because he only has an hour, he wants to make the most of it. So he fires off a plethora of “ministry practice” questions: How do you plan your weekend worship services? How do you plan your teaching? How do you...? Danny feverishly takes down some notes that he deems very practical and plans to implement them as soon as possible.

Danny, who loves the Lord and is constantly looking for practical ministry help, clearly has a tendency to copy ministry practice without considering the theology and philosophy beneath the surface. He is not alone. Many church leaders jump straight to practical questions, looking continually for insight on church practices. And this by itself, without a deep commitment to a solid theology and ministry philosophy, is dangerous. Copying ministry practice can result in one of two errors:

1. **Shallow ministries:** If church leaders run to copying ministry practice, the result is ministries that do a lot of things without a reason for the things that they do. Over time the church leaders will not be able to articulate why their group ministry functions as it does, why the kids ministry operates a certain way, and so on. The ministry practice is not built on a ministry philosophy that is connected to a theology that serves as the foundation for the entire church.
2. **Schizophrenic ministries:** When church leaders look first to ministry practice, they often succumb to the temptation to grab ministry practices from a variety of sources and expect the result to be healthy for the church. But in many cases the underlying theology or philosophy beneath the surface of a particular practice is often contradictory to a ministry practice already in place. And while the leaders feel they are only blending “ministry practice,” they can unintentionally blend contradictory ministry philosophies that cause the church to head in different directions. Some ministry philosophies don’t blend well together.

In [Creature of the Word](#), Matt Chandler, Josh Patterson, and I offer a framework that I believe is very helpful for church leaders. Instead of running straight to practice, we encourage church leaders to first understand the undergirding theology of their churches and the ministry philosophy that guides how they think of church ministry. Neither a shallow ministry nor a schizophrenic ministry will be as impactful as it could be, as God intends the ministry to be.

Read more from Eric [here](#).
