

in life and playing a meaningful and satisfying part in the life of the church. This seems to echo the call and the demand of New Leadership for a proper regard and respect for the potential of the people God has called us to work with.

In conclusion then, there is a call for a new kind of leadership in the world today which has implications for leadership in the church. The call in the world for credible leaders is echoed in the church in a call for ministers whose beliefs and values are matched by congruent attitudes and actions, who exemplify and personify the qualities expected within the church.

It is a call for credible leaders who work to create environments where people give of their best to the cause of Jesus Christ in the church and in the world. It is a call for credible leaders who enable women, men and young people to fulfil their God-given potential.

To address this call for New Leadership within the local church demands a re-examination of the traditional syllabus of theological colleges and other institutions that train men and women for the ministry. There is a need to include leadership studies of an appropriate academic level and equivalent leadership skills training. Only thus will the leadership dimensions of the office and function of the minister be properly dealt with during the period of training and only then will people equipped for the leadership role expected, if not demanded of them.

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Seven Keys for Survival in Ministry

Ian Stackhouse

I confess to a familiarity with the pressure to succeed in ministry. Coming from a so-called 'New Church' perspective, the anxiety over performance, that has been the Achilles' heel of non-conformity in general, is especially acute. Unlike our Anglican counterparts we do not have the security of history. Nor do we have a liturgy to fall back on when nothing else seems to be

happening by way of charismatic experience. Instead, success, by which we understand growth in terms of numbers, coupled to a perception that the Spirit is moving prophetically in our churches, is about the only thing that justifies our existence. Without this, what else is there to distinguish us in our ministers' meetings, where we are most conspicuous by our lack of clerical dress?

So the pressure to succeed numerically is one that dominates the agenda of the various apostolic networks throughout the country, as well as the vast numbers of charismatic-evangelical churches within the historic mainline denominations. It is, to be fair, a very typical evangelical impulse and is probably as old as the Reformation itself. But in the last thirty years, certainly within the charismatic movement, it has taken on a particular guise in the form of revivalism.

Revival just around the corner?

Dave Tomlinson is probably right in noting that there has never been a time in the brief history of charismatic renewal when revival wasn't just around the corner.²⁰ What revival stands for in the popular consciousness is large numbers of people being brought into the kingdom. The fact that revival obviously hasn't occurred yet represents in many churches a severe case of 'hope deferred makes the heart grow sick', and the repercussions for ministry in this context are enormous. Imagine what it feels like to be in such a church culture where the ministry always appears to be falling short of the mark. Note also the number of ministers who quit the ministry therefore, always feeling that they have failed. The church growth propagandists and revivalist enthusiasts have a lot to answer for even if their motivations are not entirely ill conceived.

There are two further factors that contribute to the culture of success in our churches. First, many of the people to whom we minister inhabit the weekday world of performance and profitability. In my neck of the woods, which is classic suburbia, this is enough to influence the way that the church conceives its own mission as a mission to succeed. Then second, and perhaps most importantly, is the personal factor: the overwhelming internal pressure in those called to minister to succeed and make

²⁰ Dave Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical* (London; Triangle, 1995) 23.

one's mark on the world. It is of course disastrous as far as ministry is concerned but present nonetheless in what is regarded, after all, as a most useless profession. Possibly these internal pressures, in some cases stemming as far back as childhood, are the most influential of all.

The 'keys' to survival

Put together, these factors provide an impressive arsenal against those who take the brave step of launching into a ministerial career in this particular setting. In a churchmanship that has almost no philosophy of ministry save the latest technique or most recent fad, the burn out rate is marked. What follows therefore, in the time-honoured fashion of those much loved 'keys to success' books, are seven keys for survival for people who find themselves ministering in this part of the body of Christ. Although the success syndrome, or the numbers game, is more widespread than I am suggesting, and infiltrates churches of all denominations, it is most pernicious within the charismatic movement.

I don't lay claim to any originality in the following prescription. Indeed I attribute a good deal to Eugene Peterson and a whole school of writers and practitioners who have stuck their necks out to complain at the trivialisation of the pastoral office in our day.²¹ May this article to some extent serve as an introduction to the ministerial convictions of Eugene Peterson, reworked into the rather unlikely setting of British revivalism. I thank God that I came across Peterson at a particularly formative time in my own understanding of ministry, before the church growth gurus had fully got their teeth into me. If that sounds a bit stinging it is because I feel tired by the rhetoric that emanates from places like Fuller. This rhetoric is seductive, but has little to do with the vocational call that some of us received early on to be pastors, to engage in that rather antique business of the cure of souls.²² Before you object that this sounds all rather too pastoral, some of

²¹ See Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles, The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987. The introduction is as devastating a critique of ministry in North America as you are ever likely to read.

²² See David Hansen, *The Art of Pastoring, Ministry Without all the Answers*, Downers Grove: IVP 1994.

my evangelist friends feel the same way about the denigration of their type of ministry to nothing more than a salesperson.²³

So what are the seven keys to survival?

1. Do the gospel thing and die to the pressure to succeed.

Recognise it for the modern idolatry that it is. There is nothing in the scriptures to suggest that size equals success. Though it may offend some of our managerial or prophetic sensibilities, size of congregation is most often culturally and geographically determined.²⁴ That means, in practical terms, that there is an appropriateness about the fact that in a village of, say, 2,000 people the vision is not for a church of 10,000 people. Laughable as it may sound I have actually seen firsthand the unreality that such an ambitious evangelistic program can bring to a local group of Christians. It is not that large congregations are necessarily a sin, nor that God cannot override the context in which we are working, but neither should small congregations be seen as a sign of failure. Jesus preached to large crowds and to a few disciples - it really doesn't matter. The main thing is to be faithful. The fact we find ourselves ministering in a post-modern era, where orthodox, historic Christianity is increasingly a minority interest is not our fault. Nor does it require a novel approach to the work of mission. What it does require, however, is fidelity on the part of her ministers to the radicality of the gospel, whatever the cost.

2. Treat people as persons made in the image of God, not as objects.

Church growth teaching has a propensity to trivialise people and see them only as functionaries in the church. In my churchmanship we call this 'equipping the saints', following the model of Eph 4:8-12. This text has been well worked in the last thirty years within the charismatic movement and is something of a slogan. There is undoubtedly some validity in it, but equipping is not just about mobilising the church for effective growth. Rather it is evidence of the divine purpose to fashion and shape our lives into the image of God. In the working out of that image it should come as no surprise that people do not perform like some manual,

²³ The complaint that modern evangelism lacks a theological rationale is the basis of William Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, London: Hodder 1989.

²⁴ Eugene Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980,) 209-211.

or according to our mission. In fact they often meander. And that, in the providence of God, seems to be all right.

To state the matter that way sounds like something of a compromise, especially in a churchmanship that is ideological in the extreme, as the Restorationist churches generally are. Our prayers surely are for a church where everyone is fully equipped, spiritually on fire, and evangelistically active. But the pastoral reality of weeds and tares is too widespread to deny. Once accepted it can be extremely liberating as far as ministry is concerned. In a culture where even football teams no longer play but mobilise for action, the task of pastoral ministry is to subvert such technological impersonality, and the ecclesiastical perfectionism that accompanies it. We do this by cultivating a liking for the ‘Thus and So-ness of the church’,²⁵ and a familiarity with the strange and unpredictable contours of spiritual formation. Embracing the mess and getting on with the real ministry of prayer, preaching and spiritual direction is ultimately more profitable than constant strategising.

3. Don’t be intimidated by the success of others. There are no ideal, problem-free churches. The tendency in our Christian periodicals to suggest so is what Peterson calls ‘ecclesiastical pornography’.²⁶ Whilst a spotless bride is what we anticipate and long for in the eschaton, in the meantime we have churches full of sinners desperately trying to work out this thing called sainthood. So, as Peterson might say, get on with the task of loving the church and don’t always wish you were somewhere else in greener pastures. They don’t exist.

4. Give up trying to be the messiah. Realise that God has put you there in order for you to grow - for your sanctification, not theirs. Once you realise this, church life isn’t half so threatening. Instead of running away at the first sign of opposition, difficult times become an opportunity for vocational holiness - that brand of holiness that is forged on the anvil of church conflict, difficult people and failed expectations. Not a lot is spoken about this

²⁵ The phrase is lifted out of *Freedom For Ministry* by Richard Neuhaus. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979, 1-18.

²⁶ Eugene Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992, 22.

particular form of holiness and yet it is universally experienced by those in ecclesial ministry.

If, however, vocational holiness is to have a chance of occurring in our ministry one thing that is vital to it, argues Peterson, is the monastic vow of stability. Although it is less well known than the other vows it is critical to the things we are addressing here because it insists on us staying put in one place long enough to have our messianism thrashed out of us.²⁷ Any one who has been in a pastorate as long as seven years knows this to be true because it is about long enough for a church to realise their minister is not the apostle Paul and they are not the church of Philadelphia. Once that hurdle has been negotiated the possibilities of significant and authentic ministry, free from the burdens of the success idol, are endless.

5. Resist the temptation of excessive self-critique. Leaders in Restoration/ Renewal type churches tend to constantly check the spiritual temperature of the church, or, to change the metaphor, pull up the plant to see how it is doing. This constant self-examination is a mistake, as any horticulturist will tell you. One sure way to kill the plant off is to constantly pull it out of the soil. Let the plant grow, and meanwhile thank God for the people you do have rather than lament the ones you don't have. Paul does this in Corinth of all places.

6. Stop trying to make an impact. Learn instead to abide. In John 15.4, we read that “those who abide in me and I in them will bear much fruit”. The fruitfulness comes not by trying to be fruitful, but by abiding in Christ. Indirectly is the way most growth takes place. The people who have made the most impact are those who are not trying to make an impact, but attend to the larger frame of Jesus Christ, saving and ruling. Sadly the integrity of ministry and spirituality that is suggested by such a statement is often impossible to realise given the intolerable burden of successfully running the church program. It takes a brave person to carve out even one day a month in the diary just to be alone with God in prayer. Yet we all know that one day in your courts, O Lord, is better for our congregations than a thousand days constructing church programs.

²⁷ *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, p18-19.

7. Most of what is done in the name of Jesus will never be reported on this side of glory. This last key is taken from that other disciple of holy inefficiency, Henri Nouwen. For a basic primer on Christian leadership, and how to avoid the pitfalls of relevancy, power and sensationalism in ministry, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian leadership* is a classic. If ministers really believed this to be the case we might be better able to get on with the real work of ministry, free of the burden to impress. The work is not particularly glamorous, nor especially sensational, but it is work, which if done faithfully, will enable something sensational to happen. Judge nothing before the appointed time.

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When the Pastor Becomes a Carer

Name and address supplied

We had only been six weeks in the new church where I had been appointed minister when my husband was diagnosed as having Motor Neurone Disease. I had accepted the job on the basis of a misdiagnosis. We were in an area where neither of us had family or long-term friends; we had neither parents nor children and he was an only child. I had one surviving brother 300 miles away and we had not sold our previous home before we had bought the bungalow next to the church. Our vulnerability was total.

What happened in the 13 months between diagnosis and death – yes, MND can be like that - was so dreadful that it has taken me years to adjust to and deal with – and lay to rest. Because I have let it be known what happened to me, I have heard of other situations where totally unacceptable things have been said or done that are seared on the memory of the victims of what is, in fact, abuse of the vulnerable. I am now doing all I can to alert denominational leaders to a strange syndrome that can kick in, in this sort of situation, so that they can move fast to avoid the worst of it. Yet, I dare to believe that, for at least some of the time, the perpetrators are not aware they are doing it because they are doing what seems to come perfectly naturally to them.