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Collaborative Leadership

By

David Krueger

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

2011

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Graduation Date May 20, 2011

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ABSTRACT

One of the most challenging experiences a pastor undertakes is learning how to collaboratively lead a group of elders. If done poorly, a group of elders and their pastor can harm themselves and their church. If done well, a united group of elders can accomplish things that would be deemed impossible if attempted alone. The problem is that many pastors stumble in this area because they lack collaborative leadership skills. Too many pastors believe in a world of quick fixes and hero pastors, who single-handedly save the day. Magnified by the problem that many seminaries have not adequately taught leadership principles, there is a great need for collaborative leadership training. Leadership literature suggests that learning how to lead collaboratively is something that can be learned in the midst of real time ministry. The purpose of this study is to explore how pastors cultivate collaborative leadership on church boards.

Three research questions guided this study: How do pastors utilize change initiatives to cultivate collaboration with their boards? How do pastors utilize conflict to cultivate collaboration with their boards? How do pastors utilize timing to cultivate collaboration with their boards? The study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with nine church leaders from three different churches in the Midwest. These three churches were medium, large and very large in size and three top leaders from each church were interviewed. The analysis centered on case study interviews of the nine leaders. These interviews captured their unique experiences, struggles, and stories. A constant comparative method was used in the study.

The findings of the study showed that the primary initiators within churches are the senior pastors. However, the larger the church was, the more the senior pastor was the initiator of change. The challenge of utilizing change initiatives centered around understanding that change is a process not an event, juggling church growth dynamics and staffing, the hard work of establishing concentric circles of buy-in for particular change initiatives, and the importance of delegating authority. It was also discovered that pastors can utilize conflict by being emotionally intelligent, calling personal and team fouls, by guarding and opening the gate of leadership, and by maintaining attitude that the church isn't "all about us." Furthermore, it was discovered that pastors utilize time well by building relationships with their key leaders in order to develop trust. Trust can be developed by getting to know fellow leaders as friends, being committed to other leaders for the long term, being committed to on-going training, and by carefully observing the people and politics of any given setting.

The study provided three primary conclusions. The first conclusion about cultivating a collaborative board is that it is crucial to understand change is an ongoing process that requires pastors to work hard at helping others to embrace it and understand it. The second conclusion about cultivating a collaborative board is that conflict must be constantly handled as an opportunity to grow together as leaders. The third conclusion about cultivating a collaborative board is that good timing and good ministry isn't about the luck of the draw or magic, but rather about the pastor's ability to spend time building trust with fellow leaders. Pastors can learn how to lead collaboratively.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank God for His faithfulness towards me by sustaining me through early years of ministry. I want to thank my wife, Amber, who pushed me to pursue this project and helped me see the finish line. I was also like to thank my two boys, Caleb and Joab, who have given me motivation. I want them to look back someday and say, “Dad gave it his best and so can I.” Finally, I would like to thank my mother, Roxanne, who encouraged me to go back to school.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

One of the most challenging experiences a pastor undertakes is learning how to collaboratively lead a group of elders. If done poorly, a group of elders and their pastor can harm themselves and their church. If done well, a united group of elders can accomplish things that would be deemed impossible if attempted alone. Gene Getz, in *Elders and Leaders*, makes the analogy between a collaborative functioning board and the effectiveness of geese flying in formation. He says, “As each goose flaps its wings, it creates an ‘uplift’ for the birds that follow. By flying in ‘V’ formation, the flock adds 71 percent greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.” However, he adds that when a goose works against the group and falls out of the “V” formation, “it suddenly feels drag and resistance of flying alone. It quickly moves back into formation to take advantage of the uplifting power of the bird immediately in front of him.”¹

When analyzing at how pastors collaborate with their boards, pastors hope that the board will take flight, but in many situations they crash. Such was the case with Pastor John; he was fresh out of seminary in his first solo pastorate at Wake Hills Church. John’s predecessor was a veteran pastor of twenty-five years who left the church because of board conflict. Throwing caution to the wind, Pastor John accepted the call. He assumed that because of his talent at personal evangelism, preaching, and hospital visitation he could also unify the board and mobilize the church. After arriving on sight, Pastor John quickly discovered that the board members had many different ideas on how

¹ Gene A. Getz, *Elders and Leaders* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 23-24.

to do ministry and had many unhealthy ways of negotiating these ideas. An undertow of competition, gossip, and church politics poisoned the board's relationships. Two years into the ministry, Pastor John found himself bonding relationally and philosophically with half of the elders. The other elders became furious and forced Pastor John to resign.

The elders that liked Pastor John left the church along with half the congregation. They called Pastor John to pastor the new church. Pastor John considered the call but after he developed an ulcer, a mysterious white patch of hair on his head and a new painful habit of grinding his teeth at night, he decided to turn the call down. While some heralded him as a hero for standing up for what he believed in, others thought he was unfit for ministry. In the end, he disappointed both groups of elders and found himself jobless. Board leadership proved more challenging than he thought. Pastor John's inability to understand group dynamics and negotiate interests on his board almost caused him to permanently leave the ministry. Years later, Pastor John still remembers one of the elders asking him, "Didn't they teach you anything about board leadership in Seminary?"

Like Pastor John, Pastor Tim's lack of training in board leadership led to devastating results. When Pastor Tim arrived at First Free Church they experienced remarkable growth. Their attendance increased by sixty percent. When their church membership reached two hundred, Pastor Tim tried to convince his elders that it was time to hire another pastor. The elders agreed and put it before the congregation for a vote. The new fund for the second pastor grew rapidly and soon had enough money in it to pay a full year's salary for a new pastor.

Then the momentum shifted. One elder, against the idea all along, proposed that the church take the money for the second pastor and pay off the church mortgage. To

sweeten the pot, he said that he would personally give \$5,000 towards the mortgage. Some fiscally conservative members of the church agreed and argued that the church could pay the money back to the pastoral fund after it first paid off its mortgage. Taking care of the mortgage first seemed prudent. The board reluctantly decided to pay down the mortgage with the hope of unifying the financially conservative members who strongly believed you can't hire a new pastor while having a mortgage. The board agreed to hold a fundraiser for the mortgage, and if enough money was not raised, the rest of the money would be borrowed from the pastoral fund. After the fundraiser, paying off the mortgage required most of the money from the pastoral fund. Moreover, it was discovered that the elder who pledged to give \$5,000 only gave \$1,500. In the next few months, the general tithing dropped so much that the board postponed the pastoral search. To Pastor Tim, the situation felt like a classic bait and switch. Pastor Tim noticed a decline in overall church momentum and wondered if he made one of the biggest board mistake of his life. Board leadership was more difficult than he anticipated.

Pastor Bill experienced a board challenge when he was hired as an interim pastor for High Point Church in Madison, Wisconsin. Only eight years earlier, High Point was billed as Madison's largest church with over thirteen hundred attendees. When Pastor Bill arrived, only four hundred people sat in a sanctuary built for one thousand. High Point's downward spiral was big enough that the Wisconsin State Journal wrote a story on the decline commenting, "Current church leaders don't pin the decline on any one person, and they say no theological rift occurred. Rather, they talk of how years of turmoil among elders and the church's last two senior pastors – and conflicting accounts of the

turmoil caused parishioners to lose trust in the church's future."² The church had been without a senior pastor for three years as they tried to rebuild leadership and trust. "If there's not peace among the leaders," said interim Pastor Bill, "there's unrest among the flock."³ High Point's declines shows that the ability to lead the board collaboratively is just as important when times are good as when times are tough.

Problem Statement and Apologetic for the Research

In all three scenarios above, the pastors lacked the ability to lead their boards collaboratively. Gene Wood, in *Turn Around Churches* says, "Everything rises and falls on leadership. Among other things the leader must select and build a team."⁴ Pastors, as leaders in their churches, are having difficulty building trustworthy teams. According to Gene Wood, fifty percent of seminary graduates leave the ministry after five years. Each month, more than thirteen hundred pastors are forcibly terminated without just cause and more than twelve hundred pastors leave the ministry due to stress, church related issues or burn out. As many as eighty-five percent of America's Protestant churches have plateaued or are declining in membership.⁵ Douglas Tilley writes in his dissertation that the average pastoral stay is five years.⁶ George Barna, a sociologist and the founder of Barna Research Group, researched the American church for fifteen years and concluded that, "the American church is dying due to a lack of strong leadership. In this time of unprecedented opportunity and plentiful resources, the church is actually losing

² Doug Erickson, "After decline church seeks a rival," *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 27, 2010.

³ Ibid..

⁴ Gene Wood, *Leading Turn Around Churches* (St. Charles, IL: Church Smart Resources, 2001), 35.

⁵ Ibid..

⁶ Douglas Tilley, "What Are the Factors That Lead Pastors to Change Pastorates?" (D.Min. diss., Covenant Theological Seminary, 2003), 3.

influence. The primary reason is the lack of leadership. Nothing is more important than leadership.”⁷

Certainly many pastors have not failed because of a lack of leadership effort. Most well-intentioned pastors do what they believe is best for their boards and churches. Some come into their churches ready to bandage the wounds of their people. They are gifted shepherds, but they focus too narrowly on pastoral care and disappoint the “go-getters” in the church. Others come charging in like a gladiator. They have a bold purpose and plan. But in all their gusto, they fail to foster relational capital with others, and a few years down the road, these pastors lose credibility. Some pastors do the best they can in the midst of church conflict. They quickly identify the Goliath in their church, start twirling their slingshot, and kill him. They seize victory. But when they walk up to view the giant’s slain body, they realize the giant is not a Philistine after all. The giant is just a normal church member with a different perspective on ministry.

Pastors need to learn the art of collaborative leadership. Collaborative leadership requires pastors to learn how all the different people in a church function together as a system. Collaborative leadership requires a willingness to absorb chaos, conflict, and losses and to address root issues so that people move forward together. Collaborative leadership rejects quick fixes in order to affirm the truth that people and churches are amazingly complex. Collaborative leadership requires patience to bob and weave through webs of relationships, hidden factors, and competing loyalties so that a common mission can emerge.

Unfortunately, many pastors turn to other solutions instead of doing the hard work of collaborative leadership. Pastors often look to quick fixes for easy results. Often

⁷ George Barna, *Leaders on Leadership* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1997), 18.

pastors think that a new piece of technology, a new degree, a new book, a gift of preaching, a new website, or the death of an opponent will somehow transform their churches. They attend every church conference promoting great church growth principles. But when they return home and implement the new ideas in their own church, they go up like a rocket and down like a stick. Nothing sticks. Pastors too often behave like Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8:20, who thought he could buy the ability to lay hands on people so they'd receive the Holy Spirit. Many pastors are often looking for black magic instead of Godly leadership.

In his book *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, Peter Steinke says,

To recognize and treat a problem as an adaptive challenge will rock the emotional boat. People expect their leaders to offer certainty, not to disturb them with unknowns. Likewise, people expect their leaders to secure order rather than confront them with disturbing choices. Congregational members expect their leaders to supply straightforward solutions that will quickly restore balance. However, if no behavior pattern or viewpoint has significantly changed and deep problems have not been addressed, the problems will persist and the boat must be rocked.⁸

This type of leadership simply takes a lot of time and commitment. Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky write in their book *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*,

The most common cause of failure in leadership is produced by treating adaptive challenges as if they were technical problems. What's the difference? While technical problems may be very complex and critically important (like replacing a faulty heart valve during cardiac surgery), they have known solutions that can be implemented by current knowhow. Adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties.⁹

⁸ Peter Steinke, *Congregational Leadership In Anxious Times* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 128-129.

⁹ Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 19.

Adaptive change requires board collaboration. It cannot be achieved quickly or single handedly.

In addition to looking for quick fixes, many pastors also have to overcome their own Messianic complexes. Sadly, many pastors, especially when they are fresh out of seminary, believe that they can be the single-handed hero of their churches. They lack the ability to see that changes require more than a heroic sling shot mentality. Sharon Daloz Parks in her book, *Leadership Can Be Taught*, challenges the most common perceptions of good leadership, calling them myths. Sharon believes that the leadership images of CEO, president, general, captain, dean, or boss all draw on the mythical power of kings and warriors of times past. She says, “In more contemporary and popular imaginations, these heroic roles of power and authority are distilled in the myth of the Lone Ranger and his equivalents (The Army Rangers, Batman, Superman, Agent 007, Indiana Jones, Braveheart, Spiderman, The Terminator). These images stir the blood.”¹⁰

These leadership myths make pastors and congregants alike believe that their pastor should or can save the day in times of crisis. While saving the day may be the expectation, it is only a short-term fix. Heifetz sites leaders’ ability to give back the work so that others can develop leadership skills and make independent, critical, smart decisions on their own as a key component to leading change.¹¹ Following this new model of leadership requires collaboration and training.

Despite the need for training, many seminaries do not adequately teach collaborative leadership. The Master of Divinity degree, the primary degree for most seminaries, usually has standardized classes on theology, preaching, apologetics,

¹⁰ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2005), 202.

¹¹ Heifetz,, Grashow, and Linsky, 169.

languages, church history, missions, worship, and counseling. Yet few evangelical seminaries offer any classes on church leadership, and if they do, the class is usually a two credit elective course. Bob Burns, the Dean of Lifelong Learning at Covenant Theological Seminary writes, “The responsibilities of leadership and management are rarely discussed in seminary. They often learn how to do these things on the job – not always very effectively.”¹²

Thankfully, seminaries are beginning to provide more leadership training. Covenant Theological Seminary has recently received a sizable grant from the Lilly Endowment to develop their Center for Ministry Leadership. This grant provides much needed research on pastoral leadership. The seminary conducted a study on pastoral burn out with some of the grant money and discovered five areas that are important for a pastor to survive and thrive in the ministry: spiritual formation, self-care, emotional and cultural intelligence, marriage and family, and leadership and management. The study discovered that pastors spend on average forty-five to sixty-five percent of their time on leadership and management activities.¹³ Amazingly, seminaries’ curriculum underemphasizes leadership training even though such a big part of the ministry requires it. The area of collaborative board leadership cannot be overlooked.

Michael Wilson and Brad Hoffman, authors of *Preventing Ministry Failure*, write,

We energetically attended seminary or Bible College and soaked up everything we could. We entered our first pastorate, chaplaincy, or ministry position, ready to save the world. Then reality sets in! The theoretical world of ministerial training programs often fails to reflect the real life of a typical minister: working with demanding board members, trying to please everyone (and being polite about it!),

¹² Bob Burns, *Pastors Summit* (St. Louis: Covenant Theological Seminary, 2010), 41.

¹³ Ibid., 47.

learning to lead experienced volunteer staff, meeting all the challenges of a one-minister organization, getting along with other staff in a larger church...¹⁴

With such demands placed upon pastors, they understandably struggle within their ministries. Although pastors will never master leadership, many resources should be made available to them, helping them along their journey.

Statement of the Purpose

Some pastors fail to lead their boards and then are forced to leave the ministry. Some boards mystify their pastors as to why they still have unresolved issues that hinder ministry. Other pastors may have wonderful board unity, would like to keep it that way but do not know how. Whatever the situation, individual interests and poor negotiation styles on the board often undermine the church's progress. The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors cultivate collaborative leadership on church boards. The study was conducted by researching what others have written and by interviewing pastors and key leaders to learn from their experiences and insights.

Primary Research Questions

This study focused on the relationship between pastors and key leaders in order to explore how pastors cultivate collaborative leadership on church boards. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do pastors utilize change initiatives to cultivate collaboration with their boards?
2. How do pastors utilize conflict to cultivate collaboration with their boards?
3. How do pastors utilize timing to cultivate collaboration with their boards?

¹⁴ Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffman, *Preventing Ministry Failure* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 16.

Significance of the Study

The church board affects everyone and everything in the church; therefore, collaborative board leadership deserves study. John Caverner sums up the vast influence of boards, “It is virtually impossible to escape contact with boards. We either are on boards, work for them, or are affected by their decisions.”¹⁵ The board’s health affects the church at large. In the majority of churches, the board makes crucial decisions and embodies the church’s leadership. Larry Osborn, the pastor of North Coast Church in Vista, California, says, “I’ve learned that as the leadership board goes, so goes the rest of the church. If we’re at war in the board room, it doesn’t matter how well things are going in the church at large. If the fighting doesn’t stop, eventually there will be a coup d’etat or a resignation.”¹⁶ Even after many years of pasturing, Larry Osborn has made collaborative board leadership his number one priority saying, “Today, maintaining...[board] unity remains at the top of my list, far ahead of church growth, evangelism, and every other worthy goal.”¹⁷

Collaborative board leadership also deserves further study because many young pastors do not know how easily their actions can damage a church. Fresh out of seminary, with little board experience, young pastors are susceptible to make dangerous errors, and these errors come easily. Often when new pastors start their ministry, they will hear people say something like, “The last pastor never had the guts to do this.” The young pastor feels messianic and motivated to push forward without first discovering the smart reason why the last pastor never had the guts to do that. Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky in their book *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* warn,

¹⁵ John Carver, *Boards that Make a Difference* (San Francisco: Jossey – Bass, 1997), 1.

¹⁶ Larry W. Osborne, *The Unity Factor* (Vista, California: Owl’s Nest, 1989), 14-15.

¹⁷ Ibid., 14

“Whether you are taking on a small initiative (such as planning to raise a difficult issue at a team meeting) or a large one . . . do not go it alone. Find partners who will share the dangers and the exposure. Together, you’ll stand a far better chance...of keeping your initiative alive.”¹⁸ This study can be that partner for the pastors who are currently doing it alone and may save their ministry.

Collaborative board leadership deserves further study because veteran pastors often lose sight of what is important during times of success. Pastors’ egos and salaries can easily blind them and over time they can drift away from the practices that once produced healthy collaboration with their boards. These pastors begin functioning more like CEOs or church heroes rather than collaborative pastors. They begin to rely on themselves more and their board less.

Collaborative board leadership deserves further study because pastors young and old are often unaware of power dynamics on their boards and are mystified why things do not work. John Carver in his book *Boards that Make a Difference* says, “Values and perspectives [held by board members] are thus powerful, often invisible forces that determine not only organizational circumstances, activities, and goals, but even the data that organizations admit into their assessment of reality.”¹⁹ He continues, saying, “Excellence in governance begins when boards recognize this central, determining feature of organizations.”²⁰

Finally, collaborative board leadership deserves further study because pastors tend to avoid responsibility in leading their churches when they become frustrated. Often, pastors reach their limit and express their frustration saying, “This church doesn’t want to

¹⁸ Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, 42.

¹⁹ Carver, 24.

²⁰ Ibid.

change, grow or reach new people. I've taken the church as far as it can go." In reality, these exasperated pastors are feeling defeated and unequipped. Instead, they should say, "I'm frustrated. I don't know how to collaboratively lead them."

Definition of Terms

The following key terms were used throughout this study:

Collaborative Leadership: Collaborative leadership is the art of taking the time to see how all the different people in a church system function together. It requires the willingness to absorb chaos, conflict, and losses to address root issues so that people move forward together. It rejects the belief that quick fixes save the day and affirms the truth that people and churches are amazingly complex. It requires the patience to bob and weave through webs of relationships, hidden factors, and competing loyalties so that a common mission can emerge.

Pastor: For the purpose of the study, pastor refers to a lead pastor or any other additional pastor in an evangelical church.

Boards: The group of elders who lead the church. In different denominations the board could be called the session, the consistory or the elders. While the word "board" could include deacons and trustees, this study primarily focuses on elders and pastors. The word "board" can sometimes be used synonymously with staff in this study.

Leadership: The way in which a pastor motivates people around him.

Change initiatives: Efforts on behalf of the pastor, the board, or God to initiate a new ministry, movement or mission within the church.

Conflict: Conflict is any relational, spiritual, financial, emotional, or physical obstacle that threatens a pastor from leading his elders collaboratively. Whenever people work together conflict results.

Time: The ability of a pastor to discern how to lead and how to wait for the right time to do the leading.

Utilize: To take advantage of a situation whether the situation is good, bad, or indifferent to accomplish a greater goal.

Cultivate: To encourage an atmosphere of growth in the context of the church board.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors cultivate collaborative leadership on church boards. This study looked at two areas of collaborative literature including biblical literature and contemporary literature.

Biblical Literature on Collaborative Leadership

Before looking at other literature dealing with collaborative leadership, it is important to start with the Bible. While the Bible doesn't use the word "collaborative leadership," it is practiced throughout scripture.

Jesus and His Disciples

Jesus gathered a motley crew for a common mission, and his leadership over these disciples exemplifies the highest standard of collaborative leadership. Jesus crossed social lines, political lines, and religious lines in order to call his twelve disciples. These men formed a mix of educated and uneducated, blue collar and white collar, political and non-political, well known and unknown, socially accepted and socially unaccepted. Jesus mobilized them for a common mission and commanded them to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."²¹ Before Jesus commissioned his disciples, he first trained them and patiently waited for them to mature despite chronic anxieties, misplaced loyalties, and ongoing chaos. Pushing ahead without them would have been much more efficient, but Jesus worked with the disciples and

²¹ Matthew 28:19-20.

brought them along to experience the wonder of the process so that they could one day teach others to do the same. It was a collaborative process with an unlikely group of men.

The twelve disciples are listed in Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:13-16, and Acts 1:13. Peter's name tops all of the lists, and the Gospels and Acts gives their readers more information about Peter than any other apostle. In many ways, Peter led the other apostles. Yet he was an impetuous man who often acted out before thinking. Peter and his brother Andrew were fishermen. Andrew, unlike his brother, was a behind the scenes man who often brought people to Jesus. James and John were also fishermen. Their father Zebedee was wealthy enough to hire extra workers in their fishing business and to support the disciples and Jesus.²³ Jesus called them sons of thunder because of their aggressive and bold nature. They once wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan city for not believing in Jesus.²⁴ The Gospel of John mentions Philip more than any other Gospel. Philip brought Bartholomew to come meet Jesus. Thomas is the famous pessimist who would not believe in Jesus' resurrection unless he saw Jesus' scars. Jesus granted Thomas' wish. Matthew was a tax collector for Rome. The Romans hired Matthew to collect taxes because he was a shrewd Jewish local who knew the community well and could ensure everyone paid their taxes. Local Jews did not like him. Matthew was also banned from entering all synagogues.²⁵ James, son of Alphaeus, is distinguished from James, brother of John. Not much is known about him or Thaddaeus, who is also called Jude. Simon, the zealot, was heavily involved in the nationalist party that was against Roman occupation. Finally, Judas Iscariot is famous for betraying Jesus.

²³ Matthew 27:56.

²⁴ Luke 9:54.

²⁵ Leviticus 20:5.

Scripture says he was always worried about money.²⁶ After he betrayed Jesus for thirty silver coins, Judas committed suicide. Jesus chose a motley crew to work in his kingdom.

William Hendriksen, the author of the *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* writes, “We cannot fail to be impressed with the majesty of the Savior, whose drawing power, incomparable wisdom, and matchless love were so astounding that he was able to gather round himself and to unite into one family men of entirely different, at times even opposite, backgrounds and temperaments.”²⁷ Jesus juxtaposed Peter the optimist²⁸ with Thomas the pessimist,²⁹ and Simon the zealot with Matthew the tax collector. Peter, John, and Matthew became renowned through their writings, but James the Less remained obscure. Jesus could not have picked a more difficult, diverse group. Yet, by his grace, Jesus worked with these helter-skelter men to symbolize and proclaim the message of salvation for the world.

One of the keys to Jesus’ success is how he handled conflict. In his Gospel account, Matthew gives a snapshot of Jesus’ ministry with the twelve disciples in chapter nine. Jesus sends his disciples out to reach new people with the saving grace of the Gospel, but they had to complete their mission in the midst of intense conflict. In chapter nine alone Jesus endures attacks from the Pharisees who called him “blasphemous,”³⁰ from John the Baptists’ disciples who question his holiness,³¹ from a crowd of people who laugh at him,³² and once again by the jealous Pharisees who call him the devil.³³

²⁶ John 12:6.

²⁷ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 449.

²⁸ Matthew 14:28, 26:33, 26:35.

²⁹ John 11:16, 20:24.

³⁰ Matthew 9:3.

³¹ Matthew 9:14.

³² Matthew 9:24.

³³ Matthew 9:34.

Jesus and his disciples face tremendous pressure to abort their mission and buckle under the pressure.

Jesus handles this constant criticism and attack with courage. He keeps reaching new people despite the threats. Matthew 9:35 says, “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.”³⁴ James Boice, the author of *The Gospel of Matthew* writes, “Our best and most effective response to those who hate, criticize, or slander us is merely to keep doing the right thing. We can always answer our enemies by doing good.”³⁵ In order to do the right thing, Jesus absorbs the conflict and chaos to unite the twelve disciples for a common mission.

Jesus absorbs conflict not only from the Pharisees but also from his own disciples. The disciples constantly jockey for the highest position and stab each other in the back. Bill Lawrence, a seasoned pastor and author of *Effective Pastoring*, calls the disciples propensity towards inner conflict and competition the “dreaded leader’s disease.”³⁶ In Mark 9:33, Jesus asks the disciples what they were arguing about on the road. They keep quiet because they were arguing over who is the greatest. They were more concerned about their own ambitions and positions than their common mission. The disciples displayed this selfish attitude during most of Jesus’ ministry. In Matthew 20:20, the mother of James and John tries to elevate the position of her two boys by leveraging Jesus with a request. Jesus says to her, “What do you wish?” She answers, “Command that in your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your

³⁴ Matthew 9:35.

³⁵ James Boice, *An Expositional Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 162.

³⁶ Bill Lawrence, *Effective Pastoring* (Tennessee: Word Publishing, 1999), 35.

left.”³⁷ When the other ten disciples heard about this they were indignant. The disciples were constantly preoccupied in establishing their own positions rather than working together to accomplish Jesus’ mission.

How did Jesus handle these internal feuds? First, he remained calm. Jesus was totally committed to his disciples, but he was not anxious about them. Jesus knew that they would fail, and he knew how to calm them down. Secondly, he remained connected to his disciples. Rather than distancing himself from them or giving up on them, Jesus kept talking with the disciples and addressing their issues in a calm manner. For example, Jesus calmly corrected his competitive disciples saying, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servants and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”³⁸ Jesus taught the disciples not to compete against each other but to compete for each other by serving each other.³⁹

Jesus handled the disciple’s relentless competitiveness and the daily anxieties that plagued his disciples. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught his disciples,

So do not worry, saying, “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.⁴⁰

Jesus modeled a calm, connected, and courageous leadership.

Another key to Jesus’ successful collaborative leadership is his use of timing.

Before the crucifixion, Jesus dedicated three years to his followers and disciples,

³⁷ Matthew 20:21.

³⁸ Matthew 20:26-28.

³⁹ Matthew 20:25.

⁴⁰ Matthew 31:34.

patiently leading and teaching them.⁴¹ And yet, Scripture records the followers who abandon Jesus during his three-year ministry,⁴² and the twelve disciples who abandon him in the Garden of Gethsemane.⁴³ Instead of praying with Jesus in the garden, they slept, and instead of standing firm with him after he was arrested, they fled. At his arrest and on the cross, Jesus experienced heart shattering alienation from his own disciples.

After the resurrection, Jesus persistently and patiently gathered his disciples together once again. Throughout his ministry, Jesus always reminded the disciples that he came to die for the sins of the world.⁴⁴ After Jesus finished his work on the cross, the disciples still did not believe he was alive, so he patiently tracked them down. Some were back to their old jobs fishing.⁴⁵ Others were traveling.⁴⁶ Many were living in fear behind locked doors.⁴⁷ Jesus reconnected with the disciples even after their betrayal, abandonment, and disbelief. He gathered them together and gave them the Great Commission and spoke comforting final words, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”⁴⁸ Jesus convinced the disciples of his love, and they changed from a self-serving, motley crew to self-sacrificial church leaders who would gladly die for each other and their common cause.⁴⁹

⁴¹ Matthew 15:16.

⁴² John 6:66.

⁴³ Matthew 26:56.

⁴⁴ Mark 8:31, 9:31.

⁴⁵ John 21:5.

⁴⁶ Luke 24:13.

⁴⁷ John 20:19.

⁴⁸ Matthew 28:20.

⁴⁹ Acts 4:42-47.

Paul the Apostle

The Apostle Paul planted more churches, traveled more places, and collaborated with more people than anyone else, besides Jesus, in the New Testament. Paul kept a frenetic traveling pace through modern day Cyprus, Turkey, Syria, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Crete and Italy. Within these countries, he visited almost a hundred different cities and destinations during his life, logging more than 9,150 miles by horse, foot, or boat in his three missionary journeys alone.⁵⁰ Paul reflects upon his ministry saying, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”⁵¹ Paul was an evangelist and his goal was to “win as many as possible” so that they might know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.⁵² Yet he did not work alone. Paul built a network of teams, worked through amazing stress, and used his connections to establish trustworthy elders to oversee churches. At any given point, Paul traveled with people like Barnabas, John Mark, Silas, Timothy, Priscilla, Aquila, and Luke. He developed networks of people everywhere he went. In Paul’s farewell address to the Romans in Romans 16, he greets thirty-five people or family groups, most of them by name.⁵³

Within the networks he built, Paul frequently dealt with conflict and experienced times of abandonment and betrayal. When in Asia, Paul laments to Timothy, “You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.”⁵⁴ Elsewhere, Paul says that Alexander the metalworker “did me a great deal

⁵⁰ *Then and Now Bible Map Book* (Korea: Rose Publishing, 1997), 13.

⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 5:10.

⁵² 1 Corinthians 9:22.

⁵³ Romans 16:13.

⁵⁴ 2 Timothy 1:15.

of harm.”⁵⁵ In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul describes the abuse he suffered so that he could witness Christ. He was flogged five times, beaten with rods three times, stoned, shipwrecked, in danger of rivers, bandits, countrymen, gentiles, and false brothers.⁵⁶ He summarizes his suffering by saying, “Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”⁵⁷ Paul had a large capacity to endure conflict, chaos, and anxiety by surrendering it to Christ rather than lashing out at people.⁵⁸

Paul displayed great patience in his timing. Paul’s ministry often focused upon developing elders to lead local churches, but the task took a long time. After his conversion, Paul went immediately into Arabia for reflection upon his new life in Christ.⁵⁹ After three years in Damascus, he went to Jerusalem, met Peter for the first time and spent fifteen days with him. Paul spent the next fourteen years preaching to the Gentiles before returning to Jerusalem and collaborating with the rest of the apostles. After a long time of personal recalibration and collaboration with the other apostles, Paul began planting churches and training up other leaders.

Paul taught his understudy, Timothy, to develop elders who were qualified both in their character and competency. For example in I Timothy 3:2-5 he says,

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?

Paul’s list requires character traits such as respect and hospitality. It also requires elders to possess skills such as the ability to teach and manage their families. Paul also teaches

⁵⁵ 2 Timothy 2:14.

⁵⁶ 2 Corinthians 11:24-26.

⁵⁷ 2 Corinthians 11:28.

⁵⁸ 2 Corinthians 12:8-10.

⁵⁹ Galatians 1:17.

Timothy that appointing elders is a process that may take a lot of time. He tells Timothy that an elder must not be a “recent convert.”⁶⁰ Paul knew that developing leadership cannot be rushed.

Nehemiah the Cupbearer

Nehemiah is one of the most gifted collaborators in the Old Testament. He led a disenfranchised group of Jews to rebuild Jerusalem’s wall that the Babylonians destroyed 114 years earlier. Under Cyrus, King of Persia, the Jews were now allowed back to their homeland. When the people returned to Jerusalem, it was in shambles both structurally and socially. Where protective walls once stood, rock rubble lay in piles. The disheveled Jews were living in fear of neighboring nations because the city could be easily plundered. The temple lay in rubble as well. Even though there were priests, nobles and officials in Jerusalem, no one arose to lead the people in rebuilding the city and their lives. Fear and anxiety ruled the day.

Nehemiah was not a contractor or a priest and yet he decided to do something about this massive problem. As a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, he decided to risk his career, his reputation, and his life in order to help rebuild Jerusalem. Nehemiah asked the king for a furlough from his position in Susa to rebuild the walls in Jerusalem. It was a risky request. Approaching a king with a personal request was against the common law and punishable by death.⁶¹ However, the king granted Nehemiah’s request. Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, effectively motivated the worn down Jewish leaders, helped them manage their fears, and rebuilt the wall in fifty-two days.⁶²

⁶⁰ I Timothy 3:6.

⁶¹ Ester 4:16.

⁶² Nehemiah 6:15.

Just like Jesus and Paul, Nehemiah gathered a group of men to fulfill a common mission in the midst of conflict, chaos, and anxiety. The feat that lay ahead of them was of herculean nature. The wall ran over a mile and was at least three to four feet thick and over fifteen feet high,⁶³ built without the help of backhoes, loaders, and cranes.

Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, three infamous political figures in the region attacked Nehemiah and his men. Trying to derail the mission, these men constantly threatened to stop Nehemiah and his men with a surprise attack on the building site.⁶⁴ Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem sabotaged the wall by trying to lure Nehemiah away from his work,⁶⁵ and by discrediting him.⁶⁶ They also circulated letters similar to modern day political attack ads.⁶⁷ God's people were weak from the physical demands of moving rubble and the constant emotional and political pressure from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. The people almost buckled. The pressure mounted until half of the people worked on the wall with a weapon in one hand, and the other half guarded the construction area.⁶⁸

Along with these external threats, an internal threat to their mission arose. The priests, nobles, and officials took financial advantage of the poor Jewish workers during the project. A famine struck and most of the people did not have a crop. They did not have money or food. The richer Jews enslaved their own Jewish brothers by lending to them and charging exorbitant interest rates. Shockingly, Nehemiah contributed to the problem. J.I. Packer summarizes Nehemiah's dilemma, "If I ignore this scandal, or try to

⁶³ J.I. Packer, *A Passion for Faithfulness* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1995), 81.

⁶⁴ Nehemiah 4:11.

⁶⁵ Nehemiah 6:2.

⁶⁶ Nehemiah 6:13.

⁶⁷ Nehemiah 6:6-7.

⁶⁸ Nehemiah 4:16-18.

bypass it, my leadership will be lost; I shall be discredited for ducking the issue. But if, on the other hand, I move against the scandal, my leadership will still be lost, for I shall have to admit that since coming to Jerusalem I too have practiced usury.”⁶⁹

Nehemiah approached the problem with great humility. First, he repented openly by saying, “I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop!”⁷⁰ Nehemiah called his own actions into account and held the other aristocrats accountable also. Second, Nehemiah refused special perks as their governor by not eating special food or taxing the people.⁷¹ A situation that could have destroyed Nehemiah’s credibility actually enhanced it. The people saw how Nehemiah cared more about them and the mission than he did about his own position and perks. Nehemiah’s actions led to tremendous solidarity between the priests, nobles, officials, and local Jews. The work flourished.

Nehemiah’s patience and sense of timing led to this flourishing work. In the midst of great chaos, conflict, and anxiety they completed the wall in an astonishing fifty-two days. But a closer look at the story shows that this job took a greater deal of time and sensitivity than meets the eye. Even before the project began, Nehemiah patiently planned. Nehemiah heard the report that Jerusalem lay in shambles in the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, but he waited and asked King Cyrus for permission to rebuild the wall in the month of Nisan in the twentieth year.⁷² According to J.I. Packer, Nehemiah “had waited over a hundred days, more than three months, perhaps more than

⁶⁹ Packer, 123.

⁷⁰ Nehemiah 5:10.

⁷¹ Nehemiah 5:14-16.

⁷² Nehemiah 1:1 – 2:2.

four.”⁷³ During those three or four months Nehemiah sought God by praying and fasting. Nehemiah also assessed his relationship with the king, made plans for the mission, and waited for the right time to ask the king. Although the Bible does not mention how long Nehemiah had already worked for the king, Nehemiah obviously won the King’s trust.

Once in Jerusalem, Nehemiah spent three days meeting people and assessing the broken wall’s situation on horse back at night. Nehemiah said, “The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.”⁷⁴ Nehemiah wisely waited until he knew the situation and the people before he addressed the problems and initiated the great work. The people labored only fifty-two days to complete the wall. However this quick work looked on the surface, it really came from untold months and years of relational capital and credibility that Nehemiah had built up serving the King, a hundred days of careful planning and prayer, and careful collaboration with priests, nobles, officials and local Jews. Nehemiah’s success did not happen over night, and it did not happen with Nehemiah alone.

Contemporary Literature on Collaborative Leadership

Change Initiatives

Churches need to change as their ministries grow and develop. These change initiatives can cover a multitude of activities like adding staff, new programs, or an addition to the church building. This study’s first research question asks, “How do pastors utilize change initiatives to cultivate collaboration with their boards?” In

⁷³ Packer, 62.

⁷⁴ Nehemiah 2:16.

exploring the answer, two important questions emerge, how do pastors understand the nature of change and whose job is it to initiate change within the church?

Whose job is it to initiate change within the church? Some Christians think that pastors are responsible for initiating change, others think it is the collective board, others think it is the congregation at large, and many stress the sovereignty of God in the change process. Certainly change initiatives come from all of these sources, but due to the limit of this study, the pastor and the board will be the central focus.

Randy Pope, the author of *The Prevailing Church*, teaches that while a pastor should never view his position in an “autonomous way,” it is the pastor who is responsible to initiate change and establish the vision of a church.⁷⁵ Pope arrived at this position after a slow and frustrating experience he had with his elders, trying to establish a vision for their church. Pope asked his church consultant, Lyle Schaller, for advice and concluded,

I, as the pastor, should have, in his words “gone up to the mountain to seek the voice of God.” After, believing I had heard His voice, I should then go back to our elders, who in our system of polity function as my authority. He recommended that if the elders could not, at that point, affirm my sense of God’s leading, then I should go once again to the mountain, spending time listening to God. Whether I sensed that God would lead in the same way I had perceived on my first trip, or whether I sensed that God would lead in a different direction, I should share that with our elders. If, again, they could not embrace this new vision, then perhaps yet another such mountain visit and subsequent reporting should take place. If, however, after three times we could not agree, Lyle suggested that I should then resign. If the elder team and I could not agree on vision, then I, as the subordinate in our polity, should seek another opportunity of service where my vision and my leadership direction could be in harmony.⁷⁶

Larry Osborne, the pastor of North Coast Church in Vista, California and author of the *Unity Factor*, also believes that the pastor ought to be the primary initiator of

⁷⁵ Randy Pope, *The Prevailing Church* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 2002), 70.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 71.

change. He shares a story about meeting with the chairman of the church at a pancake house to get acquainted shortly after accepting a new call. Osborne says,

After initial pleasantries, the chairman asked me what I had in mind for the church. For thirty minutes, I shared my dreams and vision. When I finished, he leaned across the table. “Son,” he said, “don’t get too many fancy ideas. You just preach and pray. We’ll run the church. And don’t dig your roots too deep, either, because it’s a good idea to move on every three or four years.”⁷⁷

The conversation stunned Osborne. He knew there was a problem because they both thought they were the initiating leader. This encounter forced Osborne to ask himself some defining questions about whose job it is to initiate change. He reflects,

Am I supposed to be the leader, taking charge, setting the agenda for ministry? Am I supposed to be the church’s employee, waiting for orders? Or am I the chaplain, carrying out the spiritual duties assigned by the board and not getting involved in the decision-making process? All my instincts told me that for the sake of an effective and growing ministry, I needed to function as an initiating leader.⁷⁸

Osborne addresses the question of why the pastor should be the initiating leader rather than the chairman, the board, another lay person, or the entire board working together. He says, “The answer is easy. In most cases, the pastor is the best qualified to lead, not necessarily by virtue of age, intelligence, spirituality, or force of personality, for many board members can surpass their pastor in these areas, but by virtue of two key factors: time and training.” He argues that the pastor on a full-time basis thinks about the problems and the opportunities within the church. Pastors continually pray, consult and solve problems, not the elders. He says, “Not that our board members are incapable of leading an organization. That’s what a number do for a living. But they do it on a full-time basis. None of them would think of trying to do it in his or her spare time. Yet that is

⁷⁷ Osborne, 63- 64.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 64.

exactly what happens in a church where the board or a powerful lay leader tries to take on the primary leadership role.”⁷⁹

Second, Osborne says that pastors should initiate change within the church because of their training. “I also have a decided advantage,” Osborne says,

When it comes to training, like most pastors, my formal education and ongoing studies have equipped me specifically to lead a church. Add to that a network of fellow pastors and church leaders, and I have a wealth of information from which to draw. When a church faces a tough situation or golden opportunity, the pastor is the one most likely to have been exposed to a similar situation. If not, he’ll usually know where to find out what the experts recommend. By contrast, most board members are limited in their exposure to other ministries. They don’t have the time to read the literature. And their network of experts is usually limited to a previous pastor or two.⁸⁰

Bill Lawrence in his book *Effective Pastoring* argues differently than Osborn and Pope. He says that the pastor and the board working together should initiate change and cast vision. Lawrence outlines four steps for initiating change.

First, Lawrence says, “Don’t think for your board. Help them consider difficult questions that will mature them and bring them together around God’s truth. Don’t let your mind be the only mind working on your board. No matter how bright we are, we all need more brain power than our own.”⁸¹ Early in Lawrence’s pastorate, he presented a paper to the elders on the purpose of the church. Lawrence realized he made a terrible mistake because his elders were not impressed by the detailed work and responded with blank stares. Lawrence said, “I learned from the elder’s look that I needed to respect them by working with them rather than by thinking for them. I also realized I was still in my

⁷⁹ Osborne, 67.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 67-68.

⁸¹ Bill Lawrence, *Effective Pastoring* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1999), 148-149.

seminary mode – write the paper, hand it in, and you’re finished. That’s not how life works with elders. I never did it again.”⁸²

Second, Lawrence advises,

Don’t lecture your board. As pastors we are used to giving lectures and thinking our job is finished. We do not change our board member’s minds by lecturing them. We may bore, anger, or turn them against us, but we rarely get them to think with us through lectures.⁸³

Instead of lecturing their boards, Lawrence suggests that pastor’s get far better results by being careful to involve them in the process so that they can arrive at conclusions together.

Third, Lawrence advises,

Don’t assume an authoritative position over your board. We do this when we think for them, lecture them, boss them, or make demands of them. There are times when we need to issue challenges to the board, but these challenges should be as rare as a healthy person’s need for major surgery.⁸⁵

Lawrence warns that pastor’s should be careful to lead and serve, not dictate. This can be done by modeling godliness and becoming more like Jesus in humility towards others.

Fourth, Lawrence argues, that the pastor is to determine the church’s purpose and initiate change by teaching the elders to think together biblically. After a time of studying God’s word independently, Lawrence says, “Draw their conclusions together in a series of observations and ask each of them to write a purpose statement . . . discuss each one’s thinking and work together until you arrive at a mutually agreed-on purpose statement.”⁸⁷

All three pastors agree that the pastor is the primary initiator of change. The difference between Lawrence’s and Osborne’s view of initiating change and Pope’s is

⁸² Lawrence, 148.

⁸³ Ibid., 148-149.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 149.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

that they seem to invite the board, to a greater degree, into the process of determining what needs to be changed. Lawrence believes his job as pastor is to make sure the board spends more time on establishing and clarifying its purpose, values, and initiating change rather than getting caught up in the maintenance and minutiae of the church. To drive his point home Lawrence says, “Most often the pastor is the initiator and developer of the process, the one who involves others . . . but the pastor cannot be the exclusive developer of the vision.”⁸⁸

While many churches differ in polity, authors John Kaiser and Gene Getz agree with Bill Lawrence that the pastor must be the primary initiator. John Kaiser, president of the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada and author of *Winning on Purpose* believes that the pastor must be the primary leader on the board. He says, “Leadership by a group – I don’t think so. Groups don’t lead; they are led. It makes no functional difference whether you replace the primary leader with a town hall meeting, a committee, a task force, a board, a team, a ministry community, or a couple of co-pastors; plurality diffuses accountability.”⁸⁹ Kaiser makes his case by pointing out that while there are multiple apostles, elders and deacons found in scripture in each case there was a primary leader like, Peter, Paul, or James.

Gene Getz, pastor of Fellowship Bible Church North in Plano, Texas and author of *Elders and Leaders* is a long time believer in the “plurality of elders.” He says, “To be perfectly honest, I have always been very disappointed with what I’ve perceived to be ministries built around the personality and abilities of a single leader.” However, late in

⁸⁸ Lawrence, 21.

⁸⁹ John Kaiser, *Winning on Purpose*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 96-97.

his quest to establish pure plurality, he shifted his position and concluded that the board of elders must have a primary or initiating leader. He says,

When I was asked, “Who leads the church” I would always say, “The elders.” In essence, that was a very true statement. And when I was asked, “Who leads the elders?” I’d answer, “We lead the church, together.” Again, this was a true response, but I didn’t answer the question adequately. The facts are that “I lead the elders” and together “we lead the church.”⁹⁰

While many authors address the question of who initiates change in a church and the role of the pastor and the board, few talk about the impact of church size on who initiates change. Tim Keller, the Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church and author of an article titled *Process Managing Church Growth*, makes the case that who initiates change is not so much a matter of position or title but is contingent on the churches’ size. In a small church, Keller says, “There are several laypersons –regardless of their official status – who are ‘opinion leaders.’ If they don’t approve of new measures the rest of the members will not support them.”⁹¹ Thinking about different church sizes Keller says, “In the small church (40-200) change and decisions happen from the ‘bottom up’ through powerful lay individuals, in the medium church (200-450) they come from boards and committees, and in the large church (400-800) they happen ‘top down’ from staff and key lay leaders.”⁹² He warns pastors that if they ignore these realities their ministry will suffer. If pastors in smaller churches think it is their job to initiate change but do not

⁹⁰ Getz, 18-19.

⁹¹ Tim Keller, “Process Managing Church Growth,” manuscript available from Cutting Edge Magazine (cuttingedge@vineyardusa.org), page 6. Abridged version published in *Cutting Edge* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 4–9, 26–27, <http://www.vineyardusa.org/site/files/cutting-edge/08-Spring-Strategy.pdf> (accessed March 1, 2011).

⁹² Keller, 11.

recognize the church's opinion leaders, they will find ministry virtually impossible and will likely be looking for a new job. Understanding who initiates change is not simply a matter of understanding pastoral and board roles but also grasping church size factors. The larger the church the more the pastor becomes the change initiator.

While church size is a factor in who initiates change, all the authors above agree that some sort of collaboration between the pastor and the board of elders is crucial to any change initiative.

How Do Pastors Understand the Nature of Change?

Many pastors write books stressing particular subjects that they believe will change churches for the better. Rick Warren, for example, in his famous book *The Purpose Driven Church*, makes a case that a pastor needs to have a clear purpose for a church to move ahead in the twenty-first century.⁹³ Randy Pope, in his book *The Prevailing Church*, describes seven factors that make a church grow, including biblical theology and polity, spiritual renewal dynamics, proper use of scripture and prayer, gifted leadership, ministry oriented laity, adequate facilities and finances, and an effective ministry plan. Believing that the seventh factor is the “often overlooked” missing link, Pope wrote the entire book on developing an effective ministry plan.⁹⁴ Larry Osborne, the author of *The Unity Factor*, believes that the most important factor in initiating change is unity between board members and the pastor. Osborne, therefore, wrote his book on board unity. Gary McIntosh in his book *Staff Your Church for Growth*, believes that one of the main reasons churches don't flourish is that they are under staffed. McIntosh, therefore, wrote the entire book on staffing. He says, “*Staff Your Church for Growth*:

⁹³ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 195), 190.

⁹⁴ Pope., 47.

Building Team Ministry in the 21st Century is designed to assist church leaders in staffing their churches for growth, rather than decline.”⁹⁵ Harry Reeder, author of *From Embers to a Flame*, believes that one of the most important change factors is a good theology of grace. Reeder says that the “grace in Jesus Christ takes us right where we are, but never leaves us where we are – it changes us from faith to faith, victory unto victory, all the way to glory.”⁹⁶ For many pastors the temptation to jump from one book to the next looking for the magical silver bullet is great, especially when the books are good. Unfortunately, these books do not diagnose the nature of a change initiative.

Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow and Marty Linsky, authors of *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, stress the importance of understanding the different natures of change for long-term healthy collaboration and growth. They say,

Leadership begins . . . with the diagnostic work of separating a problem’s technical elements from its adaptive elements. The task is to appreciate, value, and take in what the experts say, but then go beyond their filters to take into account the cultural and political human requirements of tangible progress. Anybody operating with a theory of leadership that assumes that the experts know what is best, and that the leadership problem is basically a sales problem in persuasion, is in our experience doomed at best to selling partial solutions at high cost.⁹⁷

They go on to say that,

The most common cause of failure in leadership is produced by treating adaptive challenges as if they were technical problems. What’s the difference? While technical problems may be very complex and critically important (like replacing a faulty heart valve during cardiac surgery), they have known solutions that can be implemented by current knowhow. Adaptive challenges, however, can only be addressed through changes in people’s priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Gary McIntosh, *Staff Your Church for Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 17.

⁹⁶ Harry L. Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2004), 71.

⁹⁷ Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, 70.

⁹⁸ Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, 19.

Heifetz and his colleagues show how susceptible people are to believe that a technical change can solve an adaptive problem. Heifetz describes how people are always looking for the easy fix, like when a store owner moves a retail item to a more prominent position in a store when sales are down but the real problem is that his competitor's product is better. Heifetz says that "these behaviors are all ways of avoiding the harder work of mobilizing adaptive change."⁹⁹ Looking for short term relief from a problem by consulting an expert, placing faith in a hero leader, or looking to a new piece of technology are all signs that the harder adaptive work is being avoided.

When pastors avoid adaptive work, the temptation is to trust in some charismatic leader who will save the day. Such is the case in J. O. Hertzler's book *Crises and Dictatorships*. The book notes that thirty-five dictatorships came to power in times of great crisis because people believed the dictator could fix their issues.¹⁰⁰ Robert Greene and Joost Elffers in their book *The 48 Laws of Power* believe that a leader should manipulate people so they are always dependent upon the leader. They say, "Make people depend on you for their happiness and prosperity and you have nothing to fear. Never teach them enough so that they can do without you."¹⁰¹

Rather than viewing the leader as a hero or "go to guy" Heifetz describes an adaptive leader as someone who teaches others to see the bigger picture and to stop depending on the established authority for quick fixes. Leaders cannot solve adaptive issues by "issuing a directive or bringing together experts, because the solutions are rooted in new attitudes, competencies, and coordination of the people itself."¹⁰² Rather

⁹⁹ Ibid., 84.

¹⁰⁰ J. O. Hertzler, *Crises and Dictatorships* (American Sociological Review, 1940), 157-169.

¹⁰¹ Robert Greene and Joost Elffers, *Power* (New York: the Penguin Group, 1998.), 83.

¹⁰² Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 73.

than solving people's short-term problems with technical fixes, a collaborative leader helps people understand themselves and the system they work in to deliver long lasting change. Heifetz and his colleagues say, "those in authority must mobilize people to do this hard work rather than try to solve the problem for them."¹⁰³ While this process is more difficult and time consuming it washes away the illusion that a superhero leader can alone solve the day.

One practical way that pastors can help their boards utilize change initiatives is by helping their boards to uncover adaptive issues in meetings. Heifetz teaches that there are always four meetings taking place at once in any board meeting. He explains,

First, there is the public, explicit conversation, the ostensible reason for coming together. Second, there is the informal chat, hallway conversation, or pre-meeting that took place before the meeting but that did not include everyone who was at the meeting itself. Third, there is the set of internal conversations unfolding within participants' heads related to the meeting agenda. These internal conversations often consist of balcony reflections, observations and interpretations about what is being said about the difficult issues that have not been openly acknowledged, those elephants in the room that no one is mentioning. Fourth, there is the meeting after the meeting, those conversations that occur . . . after everyone streams out of the conference room.¹⁰⁴

A pastor can learn to ask questions that uncover the board's real concerns, questions, and thoughts so that real work can begin. In order for this type of transparency to occur, the leader must confront people with hard questions even if the issue makes the room "squirm with discomfort."¹⁰⁵ Heifetz says that in a highly adaptive organization "no issue is too sensitive to be raised . . . and no questions are off-limits," and "hidden perspectives get put on the table fairly quickly."¹⁰⁶ But he warns that any leader risks being misunderstood. In issuing a technical change, the risk is that people will view the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 74.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 102.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 102.

leader as too “controlling and autocratic” while working through the more complex adaptive issues, a leader can be accused of “weakness or lack of direction.”¹⁰⁷ Leaders must carefully communicate to all levels of people in their organization “that adaptive challenges are fundamentally different from technical ones.”¹⁰⁸

While technical and adaptive changes are crucial to understand and often blend together, another important change is sovereign change. Barney Wells, Martin Giese, and Ron Klassen, the authors of *Leading Through Change*, give an example of a pastor named Larry who waited on God to build a church addition that was desperately needed but widely rejected by the members. After a time of great growth, the church needed more room, but a high percentage of the people wanted to continue worshiping in their classical historical building. Larry and his leaders were in a quandary. They sympathized with the members who were deeply attached to the building, but they did not want to stymie the growth of the church by not building a new church addition. Wells, Giese and Klassen analyze Larry’s response saying, “Rather than try to force change, Larry waited. While waiting, he continued to serve faithfully. Larry continued to wait. And wait. Until one night a huge thunderstorm swept through the area, and lightning struck the sanctuary and burned it to the ground. Change happened!”¹⁰⁹ God struck the church with lightning and burned part of the church down. The church was able to pay for the new sanctuary with the replacement value insurance.¹¹⁰ While Larry understood that the change was adaptive in nature and did not push the issue, the solution ultimately required a sovereign initiation.

¹⁰⁷ Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 115.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Barney Wells, Martin Giese and Ron Klassen, *Leading Through Change* (Illinois: Church Smart Resources, 2005), 99-100.

¹¹⁰ Wells, Giese, and Klassen, 99-100.

Wells and his colleagues stress that pastors must learn to lead through change that is out of their control. They say, “You’re not making these changes happen. You don’t necessarily want them to happen. But they are happening, and you can’t do anything to stop them. Such is the nature of change. In today’s society change is a given. Change will happen. Change is.”¹¹¹ God is ultimately the author and initiator of any change initiative. Wells and his colleagues lament how many board meetings are started with “a nod and wave to Jesus” before someone says, “The first thing we need to talk about tonight.”¹¹² Wells objects saying, “Jesus is the real business, and the most important step in leading the church through change is to seek His heart about what change is needed and how it is best accomplished. Beginning any other way will likely take us in the wrong direction.”¹¹³ Harry Reeder acknowledging the sovereignty of God in the change process says, “The purpose of prayer is not for us to change the plan of God, but for us to participate in that plan.”¹¹⁴ In many cases pastors learn that they simply have to wait on God to reveal his plans or to do something supernatural before anything can change for the good.

Conflict

Whenever pastors utilize change initiatives to cultivate collaboration with their boards, conflict inevitably arises from the change. In order to understand how pastors can capitalize on this conflict to cultivate collaboration with their boards, two questions must be asked. What is conflict and how can pastors utilize it?

¹¹¹ Ibid., 21.

¹¹² Ibid., 82.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Reeder, 92.

What is conflict? Conflict is inevitable and results from people working together. Alan Nelson and Gene Appel authors of *How to Change Your Church* say, “We know that we would accomplish little in the kingdom of God alone; teamwork multiplies our efforts. But togetherness also cramps our style. The word conflict has a Latin root that refers to striking together.”¹¹⁵ They go on to make three important points about conflict. First, Nelson and Appel say, “Any significant change initiative in a church is going to create conflict, bottom line.”¹¹⁶ Second, “If a church is so ready for improvement that no conflict emerges, it means that significant fruit has been lost.”¹¹⁷ Third, “Conflict need not be feared. It is the typical and even healthy element in any innovation processes.”¹¹⁸

Although many people perceive conflict negatively, conflict can be healthy. Kenneth Haugk, a pastor, psychologist and author of *Antagonists in the Church*, warns that pastors must discern between healthy and unhealthy conflict. He says, “On a values scale, conflict is a neutral term. It can be good or bad, healthy or unhealthy, creative or destructive.”¹¹⁹ Haugk wants pastors to understand that many people who reject their ideas or complain against them may actually be promoting healthy conflict. Pastors must be careful not to label these people as contemptuous or antagonistic. Haugk says, “For healthy conflict the church would do well to adopt the terminology of the British Parliament, calling those in differing camps the ‘Honorable Opposition.’”¹²⁰ Rather than creating distance between those who do not agree, a pastor can learn to embrace and appreciate their much needed advice.

¹¹⁵ Alan Nelson and Gene Appel, *How to Change Your Church* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), 227.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2000), 228.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 227-229.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹¹⁹ Kenneth Haugk, *Antagonists in the Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 31.

¹²⁰ Haugk, 21.

When handled correctly, conflict can be an opportunity for growth, but when handled poorly, conflict can be unhealthy. While every church has problems, the real problem is when disagreements turn into contests of winning at all costs.¹²¹ Unhealthy conflict happens when disagreements are transformed into polarized sides with winners and losers. Haugk helps pastors identify antagonists that initiate unhealthy conflict. He says, “Antagonists are individuals who, on the basis of no substantive evidence, go out of their way to make insatiable demands, usually attacking the person or performance of others. These attacks are selfish in nature, tearing down rather than building up, and are frequently directed against those in leadership capacity.”¹²² Discerning the difference between an antagonist and honorable opposition is not always easy.

Daniel Goleman, in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, winsomely describes how a leader can identify the difference between a healthy complaint and an unhealthy criticism. Using an example of marriage he says,

In a complaint, a wife states specifically what is upsetting her, and criticizes her husband’s action, not her husband, saying how it made her feel: “When you forgot to pick up my clothes at the cleaner’s it made me feel like you don’t care about me.” It is an expression of basic emotional intelligence: assertive, not belligerent or passive. But in a personal criticism she uses the specific grievance to launch a global attack on her husband: “You’re always so selfish and uncaring. It just proves I can’t trust you to do anything right.” This kind of criticism leaves the person on the receiving end feeling ashamed, disliked, blamed, and defective – all of which are more likely to lead to a defensive response than to steps to improve things.¹²³

Goleman believes that leaders can learn how to become emotionally intelligent in their interactions with others. A leader can learn to identify dysfunctional patterns of relating to others, which may include avoiding underlying issues or being aggressively insensitive

¹²¹ Haugk, 33.

¹²² Haugk, 21-22.

¹²³ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 135.

to others. Instead of being oblivious to these ongoing patterns and allowing them to continue, a leader can learn to respond to the real issues in a calm, controlled, and compassionate way.

Most conflicts circle around politics and power. Gene Wood, pastor of Grace Church in Glendora, California and author of *Leading Turnaround Churches*, has a ninety-five percent theory. He says, “95 percent of all serious problems in the church stem from a power struggle.”¹²⁴ In these struggles Wood says, “The ‘issues’ are never the issue. The underlying question is, ‘Who will lead?’”¹²⁵ In dealing with this type of unhealthy power conflict, Wood says the key is that pastors do not always insist on having their way but rather attempt to reach decisions by consensus.¹²⁶ He says, “One means of breaking the back of an ongoing power struggle is to move ahead with the majority. When uncooperative members see their fussing and fuming has not accomplished what they intended, they often see the handwriting on the wall and move on, or at least get out of the way.”¹²⁷

How can pastors utilize conflict? Whether or not conflict is healthy or unhealthy, all authors in this research agree that conflict is inevitable. All pastors must answer this question, “How will pastors utilize conflict in a healthy way for the sake of their churches?” Ken Sande, a Christian lawyer and author of *The Peacemaker*, says,

To some, conflict is a hazard that threatens to sweep them off their feet and leave them bruised and hurting. To others, it is an obstacle that they should conquer quickly and firmly, regardless of the consequences. But some people have learned that conflict is an opportunity to solve common problems in a way that honors God and offers benefits to those involved.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Wood., 47.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 58.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 59.

¹²⁸ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 22.

In order to utilize conflict, Daniel Goleman talks about the importance of emotional intelligence (EQ). He defines emotional intelligence as: “Being able, for example, to rein in emotional impulse; to read another’s innermost feelings; to handle relationships smoothly – as Aristotle put it, the rare skill ‘to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, for the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way.’”¹²⁹ EQ of self is the art of being aware of one’s own feelings, thoughts, and attitudes. EQ of others is being aware how one’s inner life is affecting others verbally and non-verbally. Goleman makes a strong case that recent research has shown that intellectual intelligence (IQ) has historically been an insufficient test of who will really be successful in life. While IQ it is important, he concludes, it is not nearly as important for leadership success as is EQ.

Goleman notes that “many people with IQs in the 160 work for people with IQs of 100, if the former have poor interpersonal intelligence and the latter have a high one.”¹³⁰ While some leadership authors do not focus on emotions and focus on a commando approach to leadership, Goleman reminds leaders that the word emotion means “to move” and is a great force that determines a leader’s ability or inability to control themselves and lead others.¹³¹

Chronicling the damage that can occur when emotional intelligence is absent, Peter Scazzero, pastor and author of *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, says that at one point in his life he was doing the work of three to four pastors, preaching love and forgiveness on Sundays, while cursing out loud in his car on Mondays. His life was

¹²⁹ Goleman, Xiii.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 41-42.

¹³¹ Ibid., 81.

unraveling. Finally, one day his wife reached her limit in dealing with his duplicitous lifestyle. She told him, “Oh, yes, by the way, the church you pastor? I quit. Your leadership isn’t worth following.”¹³² Her words terrified him. If his own wife no longer trusted him, why would his church?

This tragedy forced Peter to recalibrate his life by learning to slow down and calm down. Referring to the story of Mary and Martha in the Bible, Peter says, “One of the surest signs of Martha’s life being out of order is that she even tells God what to do! Mary, on the other hand, is sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to him. She is ‘being’ with Jesus, enjoying intimacy with him, loving him, attentive, open, quiet, talking pleasure in his presence.”¹³³ He goes on to say that Christians can regain control over their lives by slowing down long enough to “know themselves so that they might know God.” Sheila Walsh, the former co-host of the 700 Club, exemplifies this principle. She came crashing down because she lacked the emotional intelligence to slow down and listen to herself. Sheila says,

One morning I was sitting on national television with my nice suit and inflatable hairdo and that night I was in the locked ward of a psychiatric hospital. It was the kindest thing God could have done to me. The very first day in the hospital, the psychiatrist asked me, ‘Who are you?’
 “I’m the co-host of the 700 Club.”
 “That’s not what I meant,” He said.
 “Well, I’m a writer. I’m a singer.”
 “That’s not what I meant. Who are you?”
 “I don’t have a clue,” I said.
 And he replied, “Now that’s right and that’s why you’re here.”¹³⁴

Scazzero says that when we become emotionally disconnected we cause “violence to ourselves, our relationship with God, and ultimately to others.”¹³⁵

¹³² Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 17.

¹³³ Ibid., 49.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 79.

In the midst of conflict, all parties involved must remain calm. Alan Nelson and Gene Appel, the authors of *How to Change Your Church*, point out the importance of being aware of our inner life saying, “Character, as well as emotional and spiritual baggage is revealed during times of stress. Squeezing a bottle shows what’s inside; the way people handle the tension of change and conflict reveals much.”¹³⁶

Peter Steinke, a congregational systems consultant and author of *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, defines the anxiety that is looming in churches. Steinke says,

The Psalmist frequently uses the word *zarar* “human distress.” “In my distress I called upon the Lord.” (Ps. 18:6) *Zarar* literally means “narrowness.” Anxiety tightens: we think in a narrow-minded way or behave in predictable patterns. The antonym is *yasha*, signifying “open space.” The word *yasha* can be translated “salvation,” based on the word *Yeshua* or Jesus. “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?”¹³⁷

He goes on to say that anxiety “decreases our capacity to learn, replaces curiosity with demands for certainty, stiffens our position over against another’s, demands quick fixes, diminishes flexibility, and creates imaginative gridlock (not being able to think of alternatives, options, or new perspectives.)”¹³⁸

According to Steinke, the most important thing a pastor can do in an anxious church is to maintain a non-anxious presence. He says, “Since anxiety can be infectious, the leader does not want to be its source or its transmitter.”¹³⁹ Anxious people tend to freeze up or ignore things that prevent forward progress because they give power to the

¹³⁵ Scazzero, 66.

¹³⁶ Alan Nelson and Gene Appel, *How to Change Your Church* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), 229.

¹³⁷ Peter Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times* (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2006), 8.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

“past and the present” rather than to the possibilities and potential of the “future.”¹⁴⁰

Heifetz and colleagues agree that remaining calm is a key for collaborative leadership. He says, “The first step toward effective action is non-action: the ability to avoid the all-too-common impulse to leap into action when an adaptive challenge rears its head.”¹⁴¹

A recent political disaster poignantly captures the dangers of a leader going on the attack rather than remaining calm in the midst of anxiety. Jim Rutenberg and Jeff Zeleny, authors for the *New York Times* wrote,

Bill Miller, the national political director of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce recalled how his team ran an advertisement against Representative Joe Sestak, running for the Senate in Pennsylvania, claiming that he voted with Ms. Pelosi 100 percent of the time — knowing it might be a slight exaggeration. He said his team was thrilled when Mr. Sestak raised a public objection, arguing that, in fact, he voted with Ms. Pelosi 97 percent of the time. In a climate where Ms. Pelosi was toxic, “It was like, ‘Jackpot,’” Mr. Miller said. (Mr. Sestak lost in a close race.)¹⁴²

Throughout his presidency Abraham Lincoln displayed a great capacity to remain non-anxious in the face of conflict. Lincoln remained calm in the face of fierce attacks from political pundits, the death of his son Willie, the responsibility of the war, and an underhanded attack from his own Cabinet member, Salmon Chase. Historian Doris Goodwin says that Lincoln retained “his emotional balance in such difficult situations with an acute self-awareness and an enormous capacity to dispel anxiety,”¹⁴³ by finding solace at one of the local theaters at either Grover’s or Ford’s. For example, “Leonard Grover estimated that Lincoln had visited his theater ‘more than a hundred times’ during

¹⁴⁰ Steinke, 155.

¹⁴¹ Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 110.

¹⁴² Jim Rutenberg and Jeff Zeleny, *Republican Game Plan Led to Historic Victory* (New York Times: 2010, November 3rd.)

¹⁴³ Doris Goodwin, *Team of Rivals* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 609.

his four years as president.”¹⁴⁴ During this difficult time, Lincoln was able to maintain unity on his cabinet and in the union.

In order to lead people well, a collaborative leader must not only remain calm but also remain connected to the very people who are anxious. While a pastor’s gut reaction is to create distance between church members or elders who are anxious or who are creating conflict, research suggests that this distance causes more damage. Heifetz and his colleagues suggest staying close to those who are creating conflict, spending time with them, asking them for input and

listening closely to their reality (especially where it differs from yours), and taking their temperature to assess how much heat you are putting on them and how desperate they are becoming. Regularly get together for coffee, include them in meetings, and let them know you value their perspectives and insights on your intervention. Of course, it is not a lot of fun to spend time with “the enemy.”¹⁴⁵

Heifetz gives three reasons for staying connected to the opposition. First, he says, “you will never seem as evil in person as you can be in people’s imagination.” Second, “by meeting with them, you can acknowledge the sacrifices you are asking them to make.” Sometimes that is all it takes for people to feel heard and they may eventually become supporters. Third, leaders can assess how much pressure the opposition currently feels in the conflict so that the leaders can recalibrate their approaches.¹⁴⁶

One of two errors tends to challenge leaders as they seek to remain calm and connected; leaders either become detached or fused. “Emotional fusion” happens when leaders blend in too much with anxious people and “emotional cutoff” occurs when leaders stand too far away from their people.¹⁴⁷ Steinke goes on to say that,

¹⁴⁴ Goodwin, 609.

¹⁴⁵ Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 140-141.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 142-143.

¹⁴⁷ Steinke, 25.

Congregations are uniquely vulnerable to fusion. Being idealistic groups, congregations work to maintain high spirits. When premium value is placed on harmony, acceptance, and belonging, people resist information that might disturb their peace. No one wants to speak the truth. If people are emotionally linked, they may not have sufficient space to challenge one another.¹⁴⁸

It is a great challenge for a pastor to stay close to those who oppose them. President Abraham Lincoln had a remarkable ability to stay close to his opposition. Doris Goodwin, a presidential historian, documents in her book *Team of Rivals* how Lincoln actually chose political rivals to work with him on his cabinet after being elected president. Rather than distancing himself from those who attacked him, he drew them closer.

President Theodore Roosevelt is another good example of a leader who knew how to maintain his composure and utilize conflict.

While Roosevelt was campaigning in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on October 14, 1912, a saloonkeeper named John Schrank shot him, but the bullet lodged in his chest only after penetrating both his steel eyeglass case and passing through a thick (50 pages) single-folded copy of the speech he was carrying in his jacket. Roosevelt, as an experienced hunter and anatomist, correctly concluded that since he wasn't coughing blood, the bullet had not completely penetrated the chest wall to his lung, and so declined suggestions he go to the hospital immediately. Instead, he delivered his scheduled speech with blood seeping into his shirt. He spoke for 90 minutes. His opening comments to the gathered crowd were, "Ladies and gentlemen, I don't know whether you fully understand that I have just been shot; but it takes more than that to kill a Bull Moose." Afterwards, probes and x-ray showed that the bullet had traversed three inches (76 mm) of tissue and lodged in Roosevelt's chest muscle but did not penetrate the pleura, and it would be more dangerous to attempt to remove the bullet than to leave it in place. Roosevelt carried it with him for the rest of his life.¹⁴⁹

While addressing the conflict, Roosevelt kept calm while intelligently and winsomely communicating his message. Handling the conflict well actually helped Roosevelt communicate his campaign message and endear people towards him as a person.

¹⁴⁸ Steinke., 26.

¹⁴⁹ "Theodore Roosevelt," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodore_Roosevelt (4 March 2011).

Roosevelt's speech moment is what Goleman would call a high level of emotional intelligence.¹⁵⁰

Timing

The third research question of this study asked, "How do pastors utilize timing to cultivate collaboration with their boards?" Without a keen sense of timing a pastor risks making decisions that will either implode or be ignored. Timing is not a matter of luck or the roll of the dice. Timing is the pastor's ability to assess relational capital so that decisions do not harm board relationships or church momentum. Decisions can cause harm to relationships by being made either too quickly or too slowly. This question therefore looks at the art of timing and how it impacts collaborative relationships.

Misjudging the timing factors when initiating change can lead to disastrous results. Alan Nelson and Gene Appel, authors of *How to Change Your Church*, say "Church splits and intense combustion are nearly always reserved for congregations that have not considered the elements of timing, readiness, leadership, and size of change."¹⁵¹ Larry Osborn, a pastor and author of *The Unity Factor*, recalls the advice of an old farmer. "Go slow," he says, "Churches are a lot like horses. They don't like to be startled or surprised. It causes deviant behavior."¹⁵²

Sharon Parks, author of *Leadership Can Be Taught*, talks about the importance of a "time to pause."¹⁵³ Many define good leaders as those who make decisions decisively and take action; however, there are many times during a conflict or change initiative when observation and pause bear more fruit than action. She says,

¹⁵⁰ Goleman, 34.

¹⁵¹ Nelson and Appel, 228-229.

¹⁵² Osborn, 123.

¹⁵³ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2005), 224.

What is needed is a waiting and, as it were, a scanning for an image or insight (a pattern within the chaos) that will simplify and unify the disparate elements of the conflict. The pause may last for only a few seconds or several years. The pause may take the simple form of putting things on the back burner, or it may require enduring a sense of impasse and a long dark night of the soul. In a world gone busy, moments of pause in which the contemplative, deep mind can be at work (within an individual and within the group) are perilously scarce, threatening our capacity to create meaningful responses and make progress on adaptive issues.¹⁵⁴

Heifetz reminds leaders to take their time when they feel the burden of crisis and the mounting pressure from people who demand action. He says, “Resist the pressure to do something, and spend more time diagnosing the problem, even if taking that much time feels excruciatingly uncomfortable.”¹⁵⁵ By educating people that technical changes can be solved through expertise and that adaptive problems require ongoing analysis and leadership, the leader can avoid the labels of being too fast and dictatorial or too slow and fearful.

Sometimes in order to help board members work through issues and grow as a team, the leader’s job is to raise or lower the heat in board meetings. There are times when a leader must assess the interpersonal dynamics and create healthy tension and other times when a pastor must defuse tension for the sake of the board. The pastor must be savvy in knowing when to raise the temperature and when to lower it so that everyone stays in the room but not so everyone is absolutely comfortable and nothing gets done. Heifetz reminds leaders, “Your goal is to keep the temperature – that is, the intensity of the disequilibrium created by discussion of the conflict – high enough to motivate people to arrive at creating next steps and potentially useful solutions, but not so high that it

¹⁵⁴ Parks., 224.

¹⁵⁵ Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, 44.

drives them away or makes it impossible for them to function.”¹⁵⁶ The art of meaningful collaboration is the art of regulating temperature and timing.

President Abraham Lincoln understood the delicate nature of timing in the midst of heavy decisions. The book, *Team of Rivals*, is a multiple biography centered on Abraham Lincoln and other key political figures who worked together closely during the Civil War. The book highlights some of the practices that enabled Lincoln to lead an anxious cabinet and the entire union.

Early in his presidency, Fredrick Douglass, Secretary of State Salmon Chase, and many radical conservatives criticized Lincoln heavily saying that he was not speaking against slavery like he should. Despite the pressure, Lincoln waited until the right timing to pen the famous Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln later said, “It is my conviction that, had the proclamation been issued even six months earlier than it was, public sentiment would not have sustained it.”¹⁵⁷

Contemplating whether to allow blacks into the army, Lincoln said, “A man watches his pear-tree day after day, impatient for the ripening of the fruit. Let him attempt to force the process, and he may spoil both the fruit and the tree. But let him patiently wait, and the ripe pear at the length falls into his lap!” Lincoln carefully observed public sentiment, noting gradual shifts in newspaper editorials, in conversations with people in the North, in views expressed by his troops on the fields, and in the opinions of his Cabinet members.”¹⁵⁸ The Washington Daily Chronicle said Lincoln was, “the most truly progressive man of the age, because he always moves in conjunction with propitious circumstances, not waiting to be dragged by the force of events or wasting

¹⁵⁶ Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 160.

¹⁵⁷ Goodwin., 501-502.

¹⁵⁸ Goodwin., 502.

strength in premature struggles with them.”¹⁵⁹ Heifetz and his colleagues say, “An issue is ripe when the urgency to deal with it has become generalized across the system. If only a subgroup or faction cares passionately, but most other groups in the system have other priorities on their mind, then the issue is not yet ripe. Determining ripeness is critical.”¹⁶⁰

Barney Wells, Martin Giese, and Ron Klassen, the authors of *Leading Through Change* write, “In order for change to happen, we need God to change minds. Or to move someone out of, or into, our church. Or to provide funds. Sometimes it takes awhile, and we have to be patient. In our instant-gratification society we want 24-hour (or maybe 24-minute) deliverance, but it almost always takes longer than that.”¹⁶¹ Wells and his colleagues warn pastors about pushing ahead too quickly without spending one-on-one time with people, informing them about issues and ensuring their questions have been adequately answered. In many churches, a pastor may push something through to church vote only to discover later that the motion will not become reality. By waiting for people to make sure they feel heard and valued, a pastor can avoid going through “the pain of formally approving a decision only to have it informally rejected.”¹⁶²

Building collaborative teams does not happen overnight. Wells and colleagues say,

While a shepherd might be successful at implementing some changes early on, in many churches it will take at least five years for a congregation to begin really trusting their pastor to the point that they are willing to be led through significant change. In churches that have been wounded by a string of “love ‘em and leave ‘em” shepherds, it could take even longer.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Goodwin., 572.

¹⁶⁰ Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, 126.

¹⁶¹ Wells, Giese, and Klassen, 99.

¹⁶² Ibid., 88.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 97.

Research shows that whether in a church setting or a business setting collaboration takes time.

Harold Myra and Marshall Shelly, authors of *Leadership Secrets of Billy Graham*, highlight that longevity is key in the ministry. They quote Rick Warren saying,

When I began Saddleback Church – which I had made a commitment to pastor for the rest of my entire life (I was twenty-five) – I intentionally followed Billy’s model of teamwork in selecting guys who would also dedicate the rest of their lives to serving this one church. All of our senior leadership are ‘lifers.’ We’ve been together twenty-plus years and have committed to growing old together. Much of the growth of Saddleback can be attributed to this team of one mind, one spirit, identical values, close friendship, and personal commitment to each other for life.¹⁶⁴

Pastors should understand that it takes a lot of time to develop great collaborative teams. In studying over 1,435 companies on the Fortune 500, Jim Collins and a team of researchers found eleven companies that out performed the rest over a fifteen year period. They discovered that on average these successful companies took four years to figure things out before they saw any forward progress. They called this process the “Hedgehog Process,” an “iterative process, not an event,” that can be “devilishly difficult and take time.”¹⁶⁵ This is the slow, deliberate process of connecting the right people to engage together in vigorous dialogue, self-reflection and debate about their problems and potential. Great ideas and collaboration take time. Collins said good-to-great leaders experienced “no miracle moment”¹⁶⁶ but rather a lot of dogged effort and time.

To make his point that leaders are not born overnight, Collins gives examples of leaders in science and business. John Wooden, the coach of the UCLA Bruins, famously won ten NCAA championship games, but Wooden coached for fifteen years before he

¹⁶⁴ Harold Myra and Marshall Shelly *Leadership Secrets of Billy Graham* (China: Christianity Today International, 2006), 152.

¹⁶⁵ Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: Harper Business, 2001), 113-115.

¹⁶⁶ Collins., 170.

won that first championship. During that time, Wooden was “building the underlying foundations, developing a recruiting system, implementing a consistent philosophy, and refining the full – court press style of play.”¹⁶⁷ It took Einstein “ten years of groping through the fog to get the theory of special relativity.”¹⁶⁸ In 1945, Sam Walton had a single dime store. It took Wal-Mart twenty-five years before the company hit breakthrough status. In 1970 Walton expanded to a chain of thirty-eight Wal-Marts that eventually grew to over three thousand stores in 2000.¹⁶⁹

Just as Jim Collins believes that cultivating collaboration is an iterative and time consuming process, so does Larry Osborne, the pastor of North Coast Church in Vista, California. Osborne believes that board unity requires three points of agreement: doctrinal unity or the agreement on what the Bible says, philosophical unity or a basic agreement about how to go about ministry, and relational unity or the pastors’ and elders’ ability to like each other as friends. Osborne believes that fostering this kind of unity requires ongoing training and relationship building between pastors, their board and staff because there are always new and constant changes that are occurring in the ministry. Osborne calls leadership training “an ongoing process, not a one-time event.”¹⁷⁰

Steven Covey, the CEO of Covey Leadership Center, and author of the *Speed of Trust*, makes a deep connection between the speed of progress in a church or business and the ability of a leader or pastor to build trust. Covey calls this the “Trust Formula.” This formula states that when trust increases both the cost decreases and the speed

¹⁶⁷ Collins, 171-172.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 114.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 191.

¹⁷⁰ Osborne, 83.

increases. When trust decreases the cost increases and the speed decreases.¹⁷¹ Believing that leaders can improve their character and competency, Covey argues that conflict and major decisions on board levels can be quickened.

Covey says, “Character includes your integrity, your motive, your intent with people. Competence includes your capabilities, your skills, your results, your track record. And both are vital.”¹⁷² Covey encourages leaders to inspect their character by asking some reflective questions, “Am I quick to see and acknowledge the contribution of every team member? Am I focused on a ‘win’ for the entire team? Or am I primarily focused on my own ‘win’ – on being the ‘hero,’ on being recognized for my own ideas?”¹⁷³ In the midst of a church settling Covey asks, “Am I trying to bless or impress?”¹⁷⁴ The type of character good-to-great leaders possessed shocked Collins and his research team. “We were surprised, shocked really,” says Collins,

Compared to high-profile leaders with big personalities who make headlines and become celebrities, the good-to-great leaders seem to have come from Mars. Self-effacing, quiet, reserved, even shy – these leaders are a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will. They are like Lincoln and Socrates than Patton or Caesar.¹⁷⁵

Good to great leaders had character and this translated into speed and progress.

Some leaders who possess high levels of character but low competency pose a problem to this formula. This person is “a thoroughly honest person, who is basically useless,” says Covey, “You might trust him to keep a confidence, but there’s no way you

¹⁷¹ Stephen Covey, *The Speed of Trust* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 13.

¹⁷² Ibid., 30.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 85.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 86.

¹⁷⁵ Collins, 12-13.

would trust him to get anything done. He is honest but irrelevant.”¹⁷⁶ Skills and knowledge together lead to good timing and forward progress.

Talent and know-how can impress people, but these competencies can never trump character. John Lynch and his colleagues wrote a fictional work titled *Bo's Café* that describes the danger of trusting in skills and ignoring relationships. In the book, Carlos, a one-time crash and burn mega church pastor, counsels Steven, a wildly talented and successful business man whose marriage is falling apart. Carlos says,

See, a guy like you, he's got skills. And skills can get honed in isolation. Then you show up like the hero with a shiny gizmo or something that makes everyone go “Oooooo!” No one can fire you because you got skills. Folks maybe can't stand you, but they don't have a choice. You are untouchable. But there's a price tag: your skill becomes more valuable than you. What you bring is what's appreciated, not your presence. Ouch. Huh, man? Happens all the time in bad marriages. What you bring home becomes more appreciated than the fact that you are home.¹⁷⁷

Covey touches on a problem many leaders suffer from. It is the problem of having great technical skills and know-how but not being able to maintaining or build relationships.

Eventually, if a leader isn't good at building relationships his presence will not be appreciated and then it will not matter how good he is at performing things. Barney Wells and his colleagues echo the same truth by saying,

If through building relationships the congregation has grown to love you, and trust and respect you, then they are much more likely to follow your leadership through change. In the absence of loving relationships, it does not matter how good your ideas are – they simply will not fly.¹⁷⁸

In summary, the purpose of this study is to explore how pastors cultivate collaborative leadership on church boards. The literature covered the issues of who it is that initiates

¹⁷⁶ Covey, 60.

¹⁷⁷ John Lynch, Bill Thrall and Bruce McNicol, *Bo's Café* (Newbury Park, CA: Windblown Media, 2009), 73-74.

¹⁷⁸ Barney Wells, Giese, and Klassen, 85-86.

change, the nature of change – including adaptive, technical, and sovereign change, the nature of healthy and unhealthy conflict, emotional intelligence of self and others, the risks of misjudging timing factors, and the importance of building trust.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors cultivate collaborative leadership on church boards. Many pastors, while trained in many other ministerial areas, fail in the area of leading their boards. Some pastors end up leaving the ministry because of conflict with their board. Other pastors labor in frustration because their boards still have unresolved issues that hinder future ministry. Still other pastors have wonderful board unity and would like to keep it that way. The failure to lead collaboratively can undermine the progress of the entire church.

While seminary classes and leadership books can aid a pastor's growth in collaborative leadership, nothing can replace the importance of actual ministry experience in learning how to lead a board. Therefore, a qualitative study was proposed to understand the experiences and lessons learned from pastors who are in the trenches of active ministry. This study was composed of interviews of pastors and leaders from three churches in Wisconsin. One church belongs to the General Baptist Conference Church, and the other two belong to the Evangelical Free Church in America. In each church, the lead pastor and two longstanding key leaders were interviewed.

Design of the Study

Qualitative case studies were utilized in exploring how pastors collaboratively lead their boards. According to Sharan Merriam, there are five essential characteristics of

qualitative research.¹⁷⁹ First, researchers are interested in understanding how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. Second, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Third, qualitative research usually involves fieldwork. Fourth, qualitative research primarily employs an inductive research strategy. Fifth, the product of qualitative study is richly descriptive, utilizing words and pictures to convey what the researcher has learned.

Case studies were used so specific research questions could be asked to pastors and elders who were actively involved in real-life ministry. Merriam defines a case study as “intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system such as an individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community.”¹⁸⁰ Case studies were used because they account for the complexities of collaborative leadership. Case studies also give the reader a feel for the art of collaborative leadership. No one situation is exactly the same, and no particular solution can automatically be duplicated. Case studies capture the complexity of adaptive challenges in a way that other quantitative studies cannot. The case study also allows the researcher flexibility during the interview. The researcher may then ask follow up questions to uncover the motivations that led to decisions and how those decisions affect the people involved.

All the interviews were conducted in the churches where the pastors ministered. This familiar location gives the interviewees a sense of comfort that may not be experienced at a neutral site or in a different context. All the interviews were conducted in person, allowing the interviewer to capture the non-verbal essence of the interviewees

¹⁷⁹ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 6-8.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

and the ambiance of their particular setting. Personal interviews also have a greater chance of producing an atmosphere of trust and transparency between the researcher and the pastors interviewed. A quantitative survey could not produce this kind of atmosphere by capturing essential non-verbal emotional factors or adjusting in the moment to ask follow up questions.

Interview Design

Three different senior pastors were interviewed in this study. These senior pastors had at least eight years of pastoral experience in one setting. Collaborative leadership is a process that often takes time, and eight years is a significant amount of time to watch people and patterns evolve in a church setting. Besides the senior pastors, two of their key leaders were interviewed. Most of these key leaders were pastors, one was a lay elder and one was a Director of Team Development. Most of these key leaders have longstanding working relationships with their senior pastor. These long term relationships provided the researcher the opportunity to see patterns of collaboration.

The pastors studied were from the Evangelical Free Church of America and the General Baptist Conference Church. Pastors were selected based on their ability to sustain a healthy church. All three churches that were selected have grown over the past two decades and have a discernable track record of increased attendance.

Because pastors are often optimistic and sometimes paint rosy pictures of their ministry, they can intentionally or non-intentionally glamorize the past and forget some of the mistakes they make. To balance this phenomenon, two other key leaders were interviewed along with each pastor. The multiple leaders interviewed at each church allowed the researcher to see the prospective ministries from different angles.

A semi-structured format was used during the interviews to provide flexibility and flow during the interviews. Merriam defines this flexible format saying,

Either all of the questions are more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions. Usually, specific information is desired from all the respondents, in which case there is a highly structured section to the interview. But the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.¹⁸¹

This format allows the researcher to respond in the moment during the interview and ask questions not previously planned. Neither the pastors nor the elders were given a copy of the question before hand to ensure that their answers were spontaneous and frank. The researcher did not feel obligated to ask all the prepared questions if they did not fit the particular context. Each interview lasted no longer than an hour. Each interview concluded with an opportunity for the interviewees to comment on anything they would like to say. All the interviews were conducted in a span of three weeks. Each week, the researchers visited a different church and interviewed the senior pastor and two key leaders back to back. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed for detailed analysis.

Limitations of the Study

All of the pastors and elders selected for this study were from Mid-West churches because the researcher is ministering in the Mid-West. Therefore, cultural eccentricities in this study may not apply in other places.

The three churches selected in this study were within four hundred miles from the researcher's home to avoid excessive traveling expenses. This did not hinder the research

¹⁸¹ Merriam, 74.

since there were numerous churches that fit the research criteria. The churches were limited to two congregations in the Evangelical Free Church of America and one in the General Baptist Conference Church.

The senior pastors at each church selected the key leaders that were also interviewed. This process of selections leads to potential limitations in that the senior pastor was allowed recommend the leaders who would speak the most favorably.

Biases of the Study

The researcher is a young pastor in his middle thirties. He has ministered for about eight years in two different churches. The researcher chose this topic believing that it would help him become a better pastor.

Therefore, the primary reason this research was explored is for the benefit of the researcher. While this sounds self-serving, the researcher believes that if any of the research would be useful for someone else, it must first be useful to himself. William Zinsser echoes this position in his book *On Writing Well* when he asks, “Who am I writing for? It’s a fundamental question, and it has a fundamental answer: You are writing for yourself. You are writing primarily to please yourself, and if you go about it with enjoyment you will also entertain the readers who are worth writing for.”¹⁸²

Conclusion

The methodology described in this chapter helps to accomplish the purpose of this study. That purpose was to explore how pastors cultivate collaborative leadership on church boards. The study utilized qualitative case studies, a semi-structured interview design, and a careful process of selecting appropriate key leaders. While the study

¹⁸² William Zinsser, *On Writing Well* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 5.

contains certain limitations and biases, the overall design seeks to achieve the purpose of this study and answer the research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors cultivate collaborative leadership on church boards. Three important research questions guided this study:

1. How do pastors utilize change initiatives to cultivate collaboration with their boards?
2. How do pastors utilize conflict to cultivate collaboration with their boards?
3. How do pastors utilize timing to cultivate collaboration with their boards?

To answers these questions, seven pastors, one elder, and one church staff member were interviewed. These nine leaders represented three churches in the Mid-West. All of these leaders except one have served in their respective ministries for over nine years, and the majority has served for over fifteen years.

Introduction to Research Participants

Understanding each church's unique context will help readers decide whether or not particular data can be applied specifically, generally, or maybe not at all to their unique setting. No exact names of churches or interviewees are used in the following analysis.

Faithway Church

Faithway Church is a medium sized church with about 250 weekly attendees. Faithway Church is a fifty-year-old General Baptist Conference Church. Nine years ago some of the elders of the church discussed closing the church down during a transition period. Since that time, the church rebounded and added two additional pastors. The

church has a board of elders and four full time staff. The senior pastor, Lenny, and the associate pastor, Peter, are the only pastors who serve on the board.

Lenny has been the senior pastor at Faithway for the last nine years. Before coming to Faithway he served for five years as an associate pastor at a different church. He left his previous church because he longed to be a senior pastor and because the church was divided. Half the church sided against the senior pastor and the other half supported him. Lenny joined the opposition against his senior pastor. Looking back on that experience he confessed, “The side I took was really screwed up. I do believe there was a lot of blame on both sides. But truly my job as associate was to back up my senior pastor. I should have left earlier than I did.”

The greatest challenge Lenny has faced is transitioning Faithway from being a small church to a medium sized church. Some of the challenges included name, constitution, music, dress, and staff changes. Lenny is a shepherd pastor who invests a lot of time with his people and has a high level of relational capital in the church. When Lenny first came to the church, his children were the only kids in the nursery. Lenny said that when the church hired him they were “desperate for change.”

Tim has attended Faithway Church for the last thirty-five years as a member and has served on the church board for the last eighteen years. Before they hired Pastor Lenny the church went through a split. As a result of the split, Tim said, “All the people that had the money left and the people who remained could not afford the mortgage payments.” Tim said, “One Sunday night we stood out here by the door and actually thought about closing the doors, but we prayed.” Wondering whether to close the church down or attempt to hire another pastor, they decided to give it one more try and hired Pastor

Lenny. Tim's greatest challenge personally has been transitioning from a small church to a medium church. He is currently off the board and is thankful that his wife is still the church treasurer or as he said, "We wouldn't know what is going on around here anymore."

Pastor Peter, is Lenny's first hire. He was hired as an associate pastor, and for the last three years he has been working with the youth, developing small groups, and has been instrumental in helping to change the structure of the church from a small to a medium church. Peter possesses more leadership skills than Lenny even though he reports to Lenny. They have had a positive working relationship and Lenny relies on Peter's ability to navigate through leadership issues. While this is Peter's first calling as a pastor, he had previously served as an elder for three years at a different church. Senior Pastor Lenny says that Peter is a better leader than he is and often tells this to Peter, during different times of the year, by saying "you lead up well."

Highway Church

Highway Church is a larger church. Highway started twenty-seven years ago and is an Evangelical Free Church of America Church. Nine years ago, before they hired Pastor Jerald, the church had four full time staff and averaged around 350 people. Now, the church averages around one thousand people, has eight full time staff, and twenty-three part time staff. The church staff is driven, and the senior pastor and two longstanding pastors serve on the board.

Pastor Jerald started at Highway Church as the senior pastor nine years ago. He served at two other churches and has ministered for the last twenty years. He served at his first church five years and his second for about seven years. He considered leaving the

pastorate and becoming a seminary professor but decided to start looking for a third church. Jerald was attracted to Highway Church because they wanted more expository preaching, and he liked their contemporary style. Jerald's greatest challenge at Highway has been managing staff and the stresses of growing from a medium to a large church.

Pastor Mike was hired by Jerald five years ago as the campus pastor. Before coming on staff, Mike had attended Highway Church for the last eleven years, nine of them as an elder on the board. Mike has no seminary degree and was a Human Resource Manager at a manufacturing company. After his retirement, in a rather unexpected way, Highway hired him. Mike has taught the Bible for the last thirty-five years. Before Pastor Jerald was hired, Mike was the only elder of the church. When Pastor Jerald was hired he lived with Mike for four months. Mike said, "He lived with us for a couple months, so we didn't even have to go to church to have an elder meeting." Mike's greatest challenge has been meeting the needs of the growing church through staffing and keeping people connected to each other.

Pastor Danny was also a home-grown pastor at Highway church. Danny worked for ten years at Lutheran Social Services before coming to Highway and has attended Highway for the last seventeen years, many of those years as an elder. He is currently the Campus Pastor at a satellite church plant near the main church. Danny's biggest challenge has been managing the growth of the satellite church and dealing with leadership issues on staff.

Backway Church

Backway Church is a very large Evangelical Free Church of America Church that started forty-six years ago. Seventeen years ago, before they hired Senior Pastor Craig,

the church averaged three hundred weekly attendees. Now the church averages around four thousand weekly attendees and has over fifty three staff. The church is staff-driven at this point and the senior pastor is the only pastor who serves on the board as the liaison to the staff.

Pastor Craig started at Backway as the senior pastor seventeen years ago. Before arriving he ministered at a small church in the South for ten years and decided to come back to the Mid-West to live closer to family. He reflects at his first small church, how the decisions were made “around the pine tree” and now the “game has changed” in a much larger setting. He now leads the Strategic Leadership Team which consists of three people; his Executive Pastor, George, his Director of Team Development, Susie, and himself. These three make most of the major decisions for the church. His greatest challenge has been centered around managing staff and growth issues. Pastor Craig is known for “his humility and his ability to put strong, gifted people around him and be okay with that.”

Pastor Joey was hired by Craig twelve years ago right out of seminary as a youth pastor. He currently oversees about eight other pastors, is involved in leadership training, and manages the internship program. Early on, Joey’s greatest challenge was not the growth of his youth group but rather tempering his “strong independent will” in order to develop a team mentality with the other staff. Now, Joey is busy juggling staff and helping to lead a growing church. He is one of a number of pastors who reports directly to Susie.

Susie is a home-grown staffer. She has attended Backway for the past twenty-five years. She was a volunteer for a very long time until she was asked to come on staff for

children's ministry. Since then she has worn many different hats and is now the Director of Team Development. Craig, her senior pastor, says that she "makes the place run." She leads the collaborative work of the church by overseeing staff. There are more staff that report to her than any of the other pastors in the church. Senior Pastor Craig said pastors who are seminary trained and ordained are a bit taken back initially that they have to report to her. Senior Pastor Craig said that after they report to Susie they "get it." Craig says that she is very gifted and that everything she touches "turns to gold." Her nickname around the staff is "The Queen of Collaboration."

In summary, all the pastors and leaders involved in this study have a substantial amount of ministry experience. The majority, six of them, have over twenty years of cumulative ministry experience. Of the remaining three, one has fourteen years of experience, one has twelve, and the other six. Most of the pastors have learned valuable lessons in other churches and have a long term ministry mindset. Of the three churches, all of them have experienced sustained growth and all of them are multi-staffed churches. While there are similarities, all three churches are different sizes and have unique perspectives. Faithway Church is a medium church (250), Highway Church is a large church (one thousand) and Backway Church is a very large church (four thousand).

Utilizing Change Initiatives to Cultivate Collaborative Boards and Staff

In understanding how pastors utilize change initiatives to cultivate collaborative board or staff leadership, it is important to understand how change is initiated in the various churches studied.

Change Initiators

In all three churches, the senior pastors are the primary initiators of change in their churches. In the two larger churches, Highway and Backway, the staff initiates most of the change rather than the board, but the senior pastors still lead change within the staff. Pastor Mike, the Campus Pastor of Highway Church, said, “We look to our senior pastor for casting vision. One of the biggest changes we’ve made is a multi-sight location. That really came from the senior pastor who felt that building on wasn’t the thing to do.” While the pastor is the main initiator, Mike said that they don’t make any decisions without one hundred percent consensus, and if there isn’t a one hundred percent consensus they will wait.

At Backway Church, Susie said, “Craig is absolutely the initiator of the organization. But, if either George, the executive pastor, or I thought it was a bad idea, I don’t think he’d do it.” Craig, Susie, and George form the STL or Strategic Leadership Team of their church. They oversee the entire church staff and make the big decisions. While Craig may be the humble leader of the church, he believes that Susie, “makes the place run.” Susie says,

I’m the process person, how do we get from here to there, we shouldn’t skip this step, or whatever. George is like the heart, he sees stuff nobody else sees before they see it. It’s like “E.F. Hutton speaks.” Craig, I mean all of us see things from a different perspective, but Craig really listens to us. I think he’ll say, “Because I’m not a good leader, I know I need other leaders around me to help me.”

Pastor Peter at Faithway Church said, “I think change comes from a variety of people. I really think, though, that what makes change happen is our senior pastor Lenny. Typically what happens is someone has an idea and goes to Lenny with the idea and then he channels our change.” While agreeing that Lenny is the primary change initiator, Tim,

Lenny's longstanding elder, said, "Lenny is very impulsive and so we try to teach him patience." Peter agrees that Lenny is impulsive and said, "We have to have less 'hallway decisions' because Lenny is so impulsive, people stop by the church and say, 'Hey, I've got this great idea we should do this,' and Lenny would say, 'Okay, we should do that,' without involving other players or proper channels in that decision." Lenny values the input from both Tim and Peter knowing that they are helping him to be a better senior pastor.

While the pattern emerged that the senior pastors primarily initiate change, they quickly mentioned that ultimately God is the great change initiator. Craig said, "We're in trouble if we are not brave enough to listen to the Holy Spirit and not mess around; it's His city, His world. This is His church, so we are hopefully in tune with what He wants us to do."

Understanding Church Growth and Staffing

All nine church leaders interviewed expressed the important role of understanding the size, structure, and staffing of a church in order to promote change initiatives and collaborate well.

Pastor Danny noticed that as their church grew he needed to examine the system of the church as a whole in order to determine their next steps. When the church considered hiring an executive pastor, Pastor Danny said that after "examining trends of churches that size, it made sense after awhile to hire an executive pastor." He believes that without this hire, the church will not be able to utilize new change initiatives in a healthy way because the senior pastor will be too busy with administration, rather than casting vision to the board and staff. Pastor Jerald resisted the idea of an executive pastor

for a few years, wondering if he really had to give up certain tasks of administration. Eventually he saw the need for a group of leaders to collaborate effectively.

Pastor Lenny struggled when the church was smaller because he found himself making most of the decisions. Now that the church has grown, his decisions affect many more people and at times cause conflict. Lenny said, “Personally, I had to give up the ability to make free-reined decisions in the church without proper systems.” For example, Lenny approved a carpenter to start building a kid’s ministry tree house on the church property. The carpenter started building it that very day. One of the other church leaders pulled into the church parking lot later that day and said, “Who gave the go ahead on this project?” Because Lenny had not run the project by the budget committee, his quick decision caused a major leadership conflict.

The conflict culminated in the disgruntled whistle blower calling the tree house the “Tower of Bable” before leaving the church. The church called in a mediator to work through the issues and develop a leadership structure of collaboration for the future. Assistant Pastor Peter helped lead the mediations. Lenny is grateful that Peter’s gifts include understanding church systems and sizes. Lenny said, “Peter helped us see that a medium size church needs a different system than a small church. He showed us that there are more people invested now and so therefore it can’t be just a few people doing things without working through proper channels. He really helped us to see that.”

Susie and her Strategic Leadership Team experienced growing pains when they had to reorganize the power structure of their staff. At one point, all twenty staffers were on level ground with the senior pastor in meetings, all trying to make decisions at once. Eventually, the SLT had to say, “This isn’t working, twenty people can’t make

decisions.” She said that they had to make “tiers, so we created the middle department heads, so that no longer are you a peer with this person, but this person is now over you. That was really hard on the organization.” The transition took over two years. Susie prepared the staff by saying, “A day is coming when we’re not all going to be at this table. Part of the reason we are struggling now is because there’s too many people here.” She carefully explained that the selection of department heads was not based on seniority but giftedness. Many longer serving pastors reported to a newer pastor and had a hard time swallowing this pill. She said that while many of them “knew who would be best” at overseeing the different departments, “There are still people who feel a little bit hurt because there’s still a feeling of loss of influence.”

Throughout the whole process Susie demonstrated a high level of emotional intelligence as she carefully tried to understand how people felt and how they coped with the new changes. Having led her staff through the changes, most people are happy with those changes and feel they collaborate more efficiently together. Many pastors happily discovered new areas of influence and significance.

Understanding how their church grows and changes and how to keep everyone unified challenges Susie. With over fifty staff and many ministries to oversee, she says her job is about, “maintaining a healthy focus in the organization, amidst a lot of complexity.” She says, “We stay on mission and I, personally, am more involved in the systems that help make that happen, making sure that we communicate with one other, that the right hand knows what the left hand is doing, that we collaborate and it makes sense. That we don’t trip over each other.”

Pastor Craig remembers how different his first church of sixty people functioned compared to the large church he now pastors. Craig noticed that as his church changes, he has to communicate in different ways to collaborate well. When he ministered at a church of sixty people, most of their decisions were spontaneously made around a “pine tree.” Now that Craig’s church is larger he says, “You just can’t yell around the pine tree, ‘Hey, we will meet at 9:30 next week. You’ve got to send a letter or put it into the bulletin.’” As the church grows larger, Craig says that sometimes more information can fix the problem but at other times it requires a more nuanced solution. When congregants experience loss during change, they will sometimes respond by asking, “Hey, who asked me?” Craig knows that there is a cost to change and growth. Craig calls it, “trading in the two coins called information and influence.” He has learned that it is important to empathize with loss;

You have to just go, “That hurts, doesn’t it? Why are we doing this? Let’s talk about it. Are your grandkids coming here?” “No, but we’re trying to get them,” they will say. See, you get back to the bigger thing. To me, you can’t actually just run people over; they pay your salary. You have to feel for the sheep and you have to say, “But the grass over there is not bad. You give this up and there’s still grass over there. You have to have a personal conversation. But I think when they know that you care and that you are not doing it just because you want to do something, but that there’s a bigger Jesus thing going on, like we’re going to Hell and you care about that, then something kicks in: The Holy Spirit, the Bible lessons, the preaching you’ve done, prayer, something kicks in after awhile and they go, “Yeah, probably.”

Tim really struggled to adjust to his church after it quickly grew by a third. A nearby church had split and a large group of people started attending their church over night. With the added growth Tim observed,

The size we are now, you don’t know what the left hand is doing from the right hand because they more or less do their thing. So as you get bigger there’s more things going on that you don’t know about; that’s difficult for my wife and I in a way because we’re used to knowing everything about the church. She’s the

treasurer and she said, “If I give up the treasurer’s job, I won’t know what’s going on at all in the church.” As the church grows, we have to realize that we’re not going to know everything that’s happening with the church.

Tim’s sense of loss is acute because unlike all other eight leaders who were interviewed, Tim is the only one who is a lay leader.

Establishing Concentric Circles of Buy-In

The leaders interviewed in this study grapple with promoting change initiatives throughout the whole church system so that leaders and congregants alike believe in the particular initiative. Pastor Craig said, “Change equals vision plus first steps, and must be greater than resistance.” The pastors at Highway Church provide an excellent example of how to cast vision, take first steps, and assess resistance. Senior pastor Jerald says,

The process goes something like this, I give it a lot of thought, I get a good idea of what needs to happen and then I run it by two or three of the pastors that I trust very well, maybe one or two of the elders. I allow them to shape it, argue with me, and debate with me. It’s my goal that if it’s a bad idea, to get rid of it. If it’s a good idea, then have them help me make it much better. If there is somebody else that is doing something like it, we’ll buy a book or go to a conference and we’ll learn more about it. We’ll keep it under wraps on the elder and staff level, sometimes for months or even up to a year. When we’re very sure that we’re going to go forth, then my procedure is to figure out who this change is going to impact. If this change is going to impact the youth, my next group will be all the youth leaders. I’ll allow them to shape the idea. I’m building concentric circles. By the time I get to the congregational meeting, I may have a third of the people in that room, having already bought into it. From there I go to the congregation. I want an awful lot of buy-in before I get to the congregational level.

Jerald stresses the importance of measuring, sensing, and discovering what other people are thinking and feeling about issues before pushing a change initiative into action.

Pastor Danny highlighted the importance of an elder retreat that gave the elders a period of uninterrupted time “to really pray through and consider” how they would do a multi-site campus. After the overnight retreat he said, “We came out of there with a pretty unified vision of what we would do. The next major step was to talk to the

congregation about it. We communicated the vision through our monthly newsletter giving the rationale as to why we were doing this and what we saw were the next steps.”

Pastor Mike said that once the elders and staff were convinced it was a good idea to establish a multi-site campus, they then focused on getting feedback from the church to recalibrate their plans and make sure they had the support they needed. He said,

We took probably the top thirty or forty most influential families and each of us took a few families and went to them and said, “You know, here’s what we’re considering, how do you feel about this? What do you think about it?” The same when we called a children’s pastor. We said, “Do you think it’s time for this? We try to get to the place where things don’t come on the congregation by surprise where all of the sudden there is a big move and nobody really knew anything about it. We don’t withhold knowledge in a small group of leaders, we like to disseminate it into the congregation, before we vote, so people feel more informed.

Susie, also captured the process of promoting change initiatives through concentric circles of buy-in. She said that the leadership must be willing to tweak and recalibrate their plans of actions by listening to and learning from different focus groups within the church until there is broad ownership of the initiative:

You bring in the young and the old together and you talk about the church and where it’s headed, and they aren’t going to make any decisions, but you’re listening to them and you’re hearing, “Wow,” that’s what people are experiencing and it helps inform your process. They’re a part of it and they go, this is cool, so they start to like the idea and they get ownership just because you’re having the conversation and then they see your goals come out and they remember talking about that and then they own it. So you have to learn the advantages of taking time and running the process. It’s hard work. It takes learning.

Pastor Peter struggles to build concentric circles of buy-in with his board. Pastor Peter wants his elders to “buy into that philosophy of becoming a church of small groups, as compared to a church with small groups.” When he was hired he was hired to champion small groups in his church. However, not all of his elders currently participate in small groups. When he tries to encourage other church members to embrace the idea it

lacks credibility. Peter laments, “It’s been three years since I’ve been here and so it’s hard for me to push our church body to buy into this idea of everyone getting into a small group when our highest leadership level hasn’t bought into it personally.” He is still thinking through the issue.

Peter would also like his church to buy into a different stance on women in ministry. When the church hired Peter, women served as elders, but they told Peter that they believed the complementarian view and that “they were in the days of Deborah.” As soon as they trained up qualified men, the women would rotate off the board. Peter was surprised to learn that some of the board members were firm egalitarians and had no desire to rotate women elders off. The board decided to select a steering committee to determine their official stance. According to Peter, the committee was poorly chosen and many of the members selected were not theologically capable to study the issue. Instead of arguing from the Bible, the board often appealed to past experiences or raw emotion. The committee finally declared a stalemate. Feeling resistance of others and controlling his own frustrations, Peter let the issue simmer for three years.

Backing off the issue bore fruit. This year the nomination committee nominated only complementarian candidates. He said they looked around and realized their entire leadership team is now complementarian. The nomination committee told him, “Well, that’s what we all believe.” Feeling a broader level of support, Peter is confident that the board will settle the issue in the next year by changing their by-laws. The buy-in took over three years of struggle, patience, and observation.

Delegating Authority

Seven out of the nine leaders emphasized the collaborative importance of delegating authority rather than micro-managing tasks. Pastor Mike said, “I have to give a lot of credit to Senior Pastor Jerald. He is a humble guy; he doesn’t feel he has to have his hand on everything and he is willing to delegate authority. The result is that people feel free to speak their mind.”

Learning how to delegate authority has been a challenge for the board at Faithway Church. One of Lenny’s original elders left the church after Lenny said, “He came to realize that the church board was no longer going to micromanage the various affairs of the church. I think what it comes down to is authority, delegation, and freedom to pastoral staff and freedom to ministry teams to accomplish their jobs.” Even after Lenny’s elder resigned, Lenny acknowledges that he is still struggling with micromanagement and learning to delegate authority with his board. He reflects, “An undercurrent in some of my relationships has been, ‘We are not really sure, Pastor, you should be micromanaging these decisions. You need to delegate decisions more. You need to let other people take the reins and control.’” Because Lenny and his board have been learning how to delegate authority they have hired additional staff.

Pastor Craig learned the difference between being a “doer and a developer” after ten years of ministering in a small church and then moving to a medium sized church which grew into a large church. Ministering at his first church, which was small, Craig remembers the pressure of feeling like he had to do everything because often people “don’t come through for you.” His house was right behind the church, and on Saturdays

Craig and his son would check the sanctuary to make sure the chairs were set up for Sunday worship. He ended up “doing” a lot of the ministry. Craig remembers,

I was the youth pastor, I was the choir director, I was the recruiter, I answered the phone. If you dialed 319-787-5530, I even picked the phone up and said, “Hello Pastor Craig, can I help you?” Now, when I moved to Backway Church, after our first snowfall I got to church early because I knew someone had to shovel the snow. I started shoveling and the secretary showed up and the assistant pastor and they were like “What are you doing?” “I’m shoveling the snow.” They said, “We have somebody that does that. He gets paid. You’re taking money out of his hand.” Oh, wow, that was cool. I was such a doer and then I had to learn to let go of that and start developing.

In order to delegate authority, Craig sacrificed a lot of control and knowledge of what was going on at his church. Craig says, “Before, I used to spell check the bulletin and things like that. I don’t know what the bulletin says now, I pick it up on Sundays and look at it and say, ‘Oh, wow, that is going on.’” He says that pastors who need to know what happens all the time and everything about everyone who is leading every ministry, will eventually hurt the church. Instead he advises, “Find people who can do things better than you do, have coffee with them, and then give them authority. Don’t just give them responsibility, give them authority to pull triggers, makes decisions, and trust them, develop them, and work with them.”

Pastor Joey describes the danger of micromanaging leaders; “They always have to have their fingers in the mix; they don’t create freedom for people to risk and fail and own something. There is a huge difference between renting something and owning something. I think a lot of staff feels like they’re renting from the senior pastor, instead of saying, ‘No, this is your deal.’” Joey says that his senior pastor, Craig, is not the classic leader. Craig’s greatest leadership quality is his “humility and his ability to put strong,

gifted people around him and be okay with that.” Joey is amazed at the humility Craig has in allowing a younger pastor in his church to share the pulpit with him. Joey says,

Craig is a great speaker; Tom is phenomenal and a super gifted guy. For Craig to open up the pulpit to him, I think now on a 50/50 basis. How many senior pastors that you know would do that? That’s Chris realizing, “Hey, this kid is special.” That humility allows other people to have ownership, play significant roles, and discover their gifts and thus, I think collaboration naturally occurs.

Joey said that even if Pastor Craig had to leave Backway Church for some reason, the church would not miss much of a beat because, “The ministries are just not that dependent on Craig, which, I think, ‘kudos to him.’”

In summary, the interview data shows that pastors learn to utilize change initiatives collaboratively by understanding how change is initiated, by understanding how churches grow, by establishing concentric circles of buy-in, and by delegating authority. While change is initiated from many different people and most certainly by God himself, all three churches believe that senior pastors are the primary change initiator and look to them for direction. All nine church leaders grapple with understanding how their churches change as they grow. Some of these changes have to do with how the organization functions or is staffed. Most leaders have to help people deal with loss that results from a changing church. Building concentric circles of buy-in is a crucial activity of pastors who are trying to utilize particular change initiatives in their churches. The first level of buy-in has to be with the board or staff and then finally with the congregation itself. Finally, these church leaders highly value the ability to delegate authority to promote healthy collaboration within the board, staff, and church as a whole. If pastors delegate authority, they empower others to risk, make decisions, fail,

and prosper. If pastors micromanage initiatives, they stifle growth and impede collaborative efforts.

Utilizing Conflict to Cultivate Collaboration with Boards and Staff

All nine church leaders experience conflict in leading their churches. Pastor Craig says, “I never anticipate doing anything without resistance. There will always be resistance. It’s human nature.” Some of the greatest conflicts occurred with fellow pastors and board members. Two of the three churches interviewed grew significantly when neighboring churches split. About twenty-five families started attending Highway Church from other churches. At Faithway Church, Pastor Peter said they experienced an influx of eighty people from a nearby church. While none of the pastors interviewed intended to “steel sheep,” families naturally chose churches with good leadership. In all the cases mentioned above, people left their original churches because of board divisions and unresolved conflicts.

It’s Not About Us Mentality

In all three churches studied, the nine leaders repeated the refrain that the church was not about them but rather about God. Pastor Danny remembers talking to someone about a disastrous situation where “his church was crumbling, people were leaving and going to other churches, and the pastor had an affair but was staying on anyway.” This man asked Danny, “Why is your church doing so well?” Danny said,

I know it’s the Lord but I didn’t have any other answers at that point. But as I walked past our worship pastor’s office one day, I saw his screen saver that said, “I will praise Him.” That’s when it hit me, I thought, you know that’s the agenda of the staff and of all our elders. I can’t think of one who had a separate agenda they’re trying to push on our ministry team leaders. I thought, “That’s it,” our focus here is “I’m going to praise the Lord.” The Lord is first and foremost and everything else kind of falls into place after that. The congregation sees the unity of focus and they tend to be united, as well.

Pastor Mike echoed Danny's thoughts saying, "The conclusion has always been that this church belongs to the Lord; it's not ours." Mike said that when they get together for a board or staff meeting, "it's not what the senior pastor wants, it's what the Lord wants." He said that this attitude promotes wonderful compatibility and harmony on the board and staff in the face of conflict. Mike says, "Even though there might be strong personalities, people are willing to submit to one another and submit to God's authority in the situation. It really produces an elder board that is way above average in terms of our getting along and how we do business."

Pastor Joey says that he continually challenges anyone who is afraid of conflict to remember the bigger picture. He says, "People that are reluctant to approach conflict need to know it's not all about them and need to remove themselves from that equation and know that there's much greater things at stake."

Earlier in his ministry at Highway Church, Pastor Jerald told his church before a congregational meeting, "Please don't come to the meeting unless you spend an hour praying and fasting this week. I will do that, and I'm asking you to do that. I was very vocal that we are not interested in you coming; we're not interested in myself coming, if we're not willing to do that. I think that permeates most of the church."

Calling Personal Fouls

Calling personal fouls helps these church leaders utilize conflict and build a team spirit. Reflecting on fourteen years of ministry, Pastor Lenny said, "I think humility and the willingness to admit I screw up is the most important thing you can do as a leader to collaborate with your board. That goes a long way in building trust." Lenny quotes Bill Hybels, "You gotta call fouls and you gotta call fouls on yourself first." Lenny called his

own foul when he ordered a church credit card for his wife to use since she was on the children's ministry team. However, only the budget committee had the authority to order a credit card. At a business meeting the business team questioned his decision and Lenny blew up;

That was the one time in my nine years here - I slammed my fist on the table and said, "No!" I said, "You guys are insulting my wife." Then I walked out of the room. I came back a couple of minutes later and I said, "My bad." And Bill Hybels talks about that. You gotta call fouls and you gotta call fouls on yourself first.

Lenny learned that the budget committee only wanted to do things the right way, not attack him or his wife. Because he understood that he overreacted and called his fouls early, he repaired the damage before the situation spiraled out of control.

Susie gave three or four examples in which she called fouls on herself. She said, "If I'm out of line in a meeting, or feel like I got kind of emotional, I'll either apologize to the whole group, very openly, or if it was about one person, I'll pull them aside and say, 'I'm really sorry.'" In one instance, she came to a meeting unprepared. The meeting was not going well; someone was in tears; people were ornery with each other. Susie stopped the meeting and apologized for her lack of preparation, took responsibility and then resumed the meeting. At the end of the meeting one of the pastors came up to her and said, "I love working at a place where we can get into it in the meeting, we can hit the pause button, we can name what's going on, we can get through it, and then afterwards we have conversations with each individual and make things right."

Calling Team Members Fouls

If calling personal fouls takes humility, then calling fouls on team members takes courage. Of the nine leaders interviewed, two of them really struggle to hold others

accountable and call foul balls. Lenny struggles holding others accountable confessing, “I actually was a people pleaser - I still am.” Tim wants to improve his service as an elder because, “I don’t confront people. My wife gets on me all the time. I don’t like conflict.” The other seven leaders directly deal with conflict. Unlike Lenny and Tim, on the other end of the spectrum, Joey has a confrontational personality and has learned to be more compassionate and gentle with people. However, Joey warns, “I think it’s using your pastoral heart to go at conflict because I care about people and I don’t want to hurt them, but by avoiding conflict, I can hurt them.”

Pastor Peter provides a healthy balance to his staff and board who are less inclined to confronting conflict. Peter said,

Conflict isn’t always bad. Conflict can be really good as long as you can have that conflict in healthy ways. Lenny and I go round and round in our staff meeting. Lenny and I are like a married couple, we can argue and debate and I looked at him flatly in our staff meeting this morning and said, “Lenny, you’re wrong, you’re just plain wrong.” I said that boldly, but we have the relational ability that I can communicate like that with him in a way that doesn’t damage our relationship long-term.

Mike said that his senior pastor Jerald has a “take your problems head on” approach. Mike said, “If somebody calls a staff person with a problem, and the staff person says to Jerald, ‘Well, so and so called me,’ he will simply say to them, ‘Handle it. They called you, handle it.’ So our staff learns to take problems head-on.” Susie, very much like Jerald, says they “move towards conflict.” She said, “Move toward conflict, don’t have elephants in the room, don’t have meetings after the meeting, so it’s hard; you have to work at it.”

Lenny said that his board does not really fight over issues. Lenny says, “You need someone who is going to stand with your pastor and call into account what’s wrong or

stand with your pastor and say, ‘You know, our pastor is right on this one.’ Plurality of elders must stand together, not fighting every step or being so passive they don’t provide leadership. We are growing on that.”

Early in ministry, Joey held a terrible attitude toward other ministries in the church. “Screw everything else except student ministries,” was unfortunately his mode of operation. Unable to see how his actions and emotions negatively impacted other colleagues, Joey’s executive pastor, George, placed him on probation. Joey calls his probation a definitive moment:

I think it was just really God’s mercy and grace, but just kind of after a week of thinking about it, I really decided that I was just really going to respond humbly and I was going to respond in a teachable way. I think over the next couple of years, as I tried to be much more of a team player with staff and tried to be aware of how I was perceived; the climate for me around here changed a lot.

Looking back he believes that conversation with his executive pastor was “an instrumental moment in my growth and development as a leader.”

Guarding the Gate

Pastor Mike believes that the key in preserving harmony and unity on his board and staff is to “guard the gate.” He explains, “Part of that guarding the gate is, in my opinion, the idea that there are only certain people in a congregation that are elder material. God calls elders. To be an elder is not to get elected; it’s to be called by God to fulfill a function in the body of Christ.” Pastor Mike guards the gate by allowing current elders to nominate new elders, rather than allowing members at large to serve on the nomination committee. Pastor Danny echoes the same concern when he says, “Sometimes new pastors will be inheriting elders, but from there on out, just be very, very careful about whom you bring on and that they follow I Timothy 3 and Titus as well.

Just following those guidelines very carefully can save a lot of headaches in the long run.”

Susie also warns,

Choose who you are collaborating with very carefully. If you get people that are on the board or on staff who are not learners, you can't collaborate. People have to be able to listen to each other, learn how to speak the truth in love. There's a lot more to leading collaboratively than meets the eye and I think very few people think about how to do it well.

Susie's senior pastor, Craig, said, “We have run into difficulties when people just felt they needed to be on the board because that's what they wanted to do and really it wasn't their best role.”

Pastor Lenny recalls one of his greatest leadership mistakes when his board made a judgment error and placed an immature, critical person in an important leadership role. “We figured he was mature enough,” Lenny said, “But looking back he was just going through a cycle, and now he had cycled down again. He had never seen the inside of a church and how messy it can be sometimes. Now once he saw the inside he began questioning everything we were doing.” At one point when the church built a children's ministry tree house, the rogue leader said it was the “Tower of Babel.” Lenny and his board learned the painful way that putting someone in a leadership role who was not qualified creates unending conflict.

Opening the Gate

While guarding the gate is a proactive way to avoid future conflicts, many leaders painfully learned that sometimes the best thing for a church is to open the gate so that some people can leave. Lenny calls it “addition through subtraction.” Craig says, “You

chose who you lose.” All agree it’s a painful but healthy part of cultivating a healthy church.

Pastor Lenny regrets not letting one of his elders leave the board. His decision produced more agony over the long haul. Knowing his elder was unhappy, Lenny discovered that the elder was very displeased with him and the overall direction of the church. Lenny remembers begging this elder to stay on the board by saying, “Stay. Stay on.” The elder said, “Sure.” Lenny said, “That was probably one of my top three biggest mistakes ever, convincing a board member to stay on, who was not in line with my leadership, vision, and direction of the church. I should have gracefully let him leave right then.” As a result for the next year, an undertow of constant dissonance plagued the board before the elder finally resigned. Lenny begged the elder to stay on because, “I thought it was my job to keep everyone happy and the last thing I wanted was for an elder to quit the board. I just wasn’t mature enough in my leadership to realize that addition through subtraction was often the best thing for the church.”

Peter said, “Lenny is a relational guy and he has a really hard time when people hate the church. And for me, I’m more of a church planter mentality and I’m like ‘Eh, let him go, its growth for our church. We don’t need him around here; they’re just destructive to our church anyway.’”

In a decision for the church’s best interest, Pastor Jerald unfortunately had to let one of his close friends and colleagues go. The church had out grown his music pastor’s abilities to coordinate an increasing number of worship teams. Jerald said, “The ministry in the worship/drama did not advance at this time and might have taken a step back.” The decision to let him go was agonizing and time consuming for Jerald. Jerald said, “I would

say I balanced two groups at the same time, exchanging information between elders and pastors, pastors and elders, and never leaving the individual out of the discussions. He always knew what we were talking about and was part of it.” During the painful process, Jerald leaned mostly on his youth pastor because “he was of the right generation and knew music.” Jerald said, “It is my conviction that a senior pastor ought to have the right to let someone go because then you have the stick, but it’s also my conviction that you ought never do it without your elder board, or you’re just begging for trouble.” This experience helped the board and elders come closer together as a team.

Not only do leaders struggle through the pains of choosing the right people for leadership positions, but they also want the right people in their churches. Pastor Craig said that in his seventeen years of ministry at Backway Church he has had about 1,000 people leave. He said, “When the worship wars were happening, and the guitars were starting to show up, my phrase was ‘you choose who you lose.’” Craig knew that sometimes people were going to leave no matter what and the important thing is that the pastor takes a position on matters so that the people who do leave are the ones who no longer agree with the church’s overall direction.

No Surprises

Two of the three churches emphasized the importance of communicating in a way that does not uproot or surprise people. Pastor Joey said, “We have a no surprise policy around here, so it’s the same with my team. I don’t want to be walking down the hall and have a parent come up to me and say, ‘Hey, did you hear what happened at that high school?’ If there are big things that happen in the ministry, just FYI that it happened.” Joey said, “We have regularly scheduled mid-year evaluations and end of the year

evaluations, so we have natural opportunities to discuss issues. I try to tell my teams to never have huge surprises.” Earlier in Joey’s ministry when his Executive Pastor George placed him on probation, Joey wishes that George would have addressed the issues sooner so it did not surprise him. Joey said, “If you’re letting someone go, even in the steps up to that, if I’m sitting down with my team and we’re having a very serious conversation about something that especially is a pattern, I would hope that I would mention that before, with increasing stringency.”

Pastor Craig emphasized open lines of communication when he said, “With us, its ‘naked,’ totally everything is out on the table, no holding back. No surprises. They know that I don’t like surprises, so there are no surprises. I don’t care if my mother is really sick and I’m visiting her in the hospital, if something bad is happening here, I want to know.”

Pastor Jerald’s elders experience frustration when he does not inform them fast enough about particular issues. Jerald says that he does not tell them about some situations because the situation might resolve itself. When it does not, the elders feel surprised. He is still trying to find a balance.

In summary, conflict was a continuous challenge that all nine church leaders worked to navigate through. Most leaders weather conflict and dissipate it because they have an attitude that the church is “not all about us.” By calling personal fouls, these leaders often turn conflict into an opportunity to build credibility with one another. These leaders also have the courage to hold other people accountable by calling team fouls. They identify the ability to discern how to guard and how to open the gate as major factor in preventing conflict on the board or staff level. Guarding the gate of leadership ensures

qualified leaders are elected to important positions within the church. Opening the gate allows leaders to step down from positions and certain people to leave the church for the overall health of the church. Finally, most of these leaders embrace a “no surprise policy” when communicating information to others. Learning to keep people who are involved or affected by decisions properly informed prevents unhealthy shock and promotes healthy collaboration within the church.

Utilizing Timing to Cultivate Collaborative Boards and Staff

All nine leaders interviewed wrestle with timing issues in their churches.

Backway Church had to decide when to move to a new location and build. Highway Church had to decide when to start a satellite church and fire a pastor. Faithway Church had to decide when to move to a nearby school to accommodate their new growth.

Outgrowing their current facility, Faithway Church now meets in a nearby school to accommodate the growth. Elder Tim believes that they moved to the nearby school too soon. Tim believes that Lenny pushed the move too quickly during a worship service, and now he is tired from setting up and taking down chairs all the time. He asked Pastor Lenny, “Do you think we moved to the school too early?” Lenny didn’t think so, he thought they moved at a great time. Pastor Peter, on the other hand, would like to meet at the school location forever because he was in a church in Saint Louis that met at a school and it attracted people who would never go to a formal church. While all three have different timing perspectives, all three are aware of their different positions and all three trust each other.

Pastor Danny said that when they had to fire their pastor of worship, he was one of the last pastors to think the time was right to let him go. Once the worship pastor

resigned, some people were “really on us,” Danny recalls. They wanted to know why it had happened. Yet, other people told Danny, “This needed to happen.” Danny thinks that because people were split on the issue, “the situation was probably handled right.” For Danny, his Senior Pastor Jerald and his colleague Pastor Mike, the timing came down to trust. They trusted each other in the difficult process of working the decision through the staff and board. They had the trust of the congregation that what they were doing was for the health of the church.

Pastor Jerald regrets not bringing the worship pastor’s wife into the process sooner because she felt unheard and offended. After Pastor Jerald talked with her, she came to understand the dynamics and even said, “This must really hurt you, Jerald, to do this, doesn’t it?” She trusted Jerald even though he was in the process of firing her husband. Even after the worship pastor resigned, he and his wife’s relationship with Jerald still remained intact. They even shared Christmas dinner at Jerald’s house the following year.

Building Trust with Boards

While many of the leaders interviewed had different thoughts on the timing of their particular initiatives, they all stated that understanding good timing has to do with mutual trust. Pastor Lenny said that one of the best things a pastor can do to cultivate collaboration with his board is to spend personal time with each board member. He says, “Invest one-on-one with your elders. Make that one of your top ministry priorities right up there with preparing the Sunday message.” Lenny has developed such a high level of trust on his board that his first hire, Peter, having only been there about a year and a half, was able to confess to the board that he was having marriage problems. A pastoral friend

told Peter, “There is no way I’d ever tell my board I was struggling with my marriage because I’d be fired tomorrow.” The board was such a safe place for Peter that he could be open about his deepest struggles. The board responded by sending him on a week-long marriage retreat. Peter said, “I never feel afraid to be able to share with my board because they’re safe people, they are supportive, and they get it.”

Pastor Jerald says that his goal is to always “mix business with pleasure” in order to cultivate trust with his elders. For him taking the time to enjoy his elders and staff is more challenging than preparing a teaching lesson or talking church strategy in a meeting. He said, “This doesn’t naturally come to me, I want to get work done. I’m a driven guy.” Recently, his elders decided to have their meetings quarterly at each others’ homes, and before the meeting they eat together. Jerald confessed, that on Monday, just before going out to dinner with the elders, he said to his wife, “What a waste of time!” After he got home he recanted, “I knew it wasn’t a waste of time and so did my wife. It was very, very valuable and I’m glad we did it.”

When thinking through how to build trust with elders, Pastor Danny, likes to quote James, “Be quick to listen and slow to speak.” He says, “I think to cultivate relationships with your leaders, just getting to know them and what makes them tick, what their passions are, is key.”

Pastor Joey cultivates collaborative relationships with his staff by “getting to know them personally and being serious about that, not being cavalier, really putting stock, putting time, and putting money into personal relationships. I think it is huge.” He said that when they have meetings, they always make sure they have significant time to ask how everyone is doing. That may even include asking how their dog is, how their

grandmother is and so forth. Just like Pastor Jerald, Joey seems to know that often pastors think it is a waste of time to delve into such personal matters. He says they schedule pockets of time to just “hang and heal and that is not wasted time.” They even have gone as far as requiring the staff to take “forced days away with God,” where they pray for each other, recalibrate their ministries, and reprioritize relationships with each other and family. When staff members come back from these days off, Joey requires them to hand in reports about their time off so he can know how to pray for them and above all so they know he cares for them.

The Key of Board or Staff Longevity

Susie, her senior pastor Craig, and the executive pastor have all served Backway Church for several decades together. They have formed a tight bond of trust between each other over the years. Humble reflecting on the fact that they are in the top three leadership positions in the church she said, “Unlike a lot of young staffers, we don’t care if we’re in that position or not and we don’t care about our future.” She emphatically went on to say,

All of the guys and gals around this table are younger; they want to be at the top, so the minute they come in, into the trust of the three, there’s a little bit of a personal agenda. “I’m in this room I get to be the” . . . It’s like, we can’t deal with that at this level. We are like Craig’s’ left and right arm and so he is not going to be open with that whole group like he is with us. We are really his trust.

As a result of having a high level of trust at the top, she says that they have produced a culture throughout their church where “it’s a safe place to say what you think and we’ll take it.”

Lenny observed that board and pastoral longevity is the key to building trust at his church. It took him about five or six years before he began to see positive results in his

church. He said, “Leadership longevity is key to growth.” Pastor Jerald believes board longevity is a top priority in growing closer together and in growing the church. Jerald believes that the board should not rotate elders and leaders on and off every year. Quoting Larry Osborn he says, “Who would buy stock in a company in which the board changes every 12 months?” Jerald says,

I’ve lived that and I hate it, so my elders that I have now I’ve been working with and they’ve been working with me for a number of years. When one leaves, we bring on another one, but our intent is not to have a new elder board every 12 months. I think longevity also allows for transparency which can’t exist when you’re constantly switching things up.

Building Congregational Trust – Walking Slowly Among the People

Pastor Jerald said the main lesson he learned as a younger pastor at his first church was to “walk slowly among the people.” Mike said that they “walk slowly among the people” at Highway church by setting aside times to mingle with the congregation.

On Sunday morning, we’re not doing last minute preparations just before the service starts; we’re spending time with the congregation. We need to be prepared so that you can greet people; you can just relax. If you just walked into the church as a stranger and looked around, you wouldn’t be able to tell the pastors from the congregation, but there are four or five of them fellowshiping with people.

Pastor Lenny has a tremendous amount of relational capital that he has built up with his congregation in the last nine years. Commenting on this relational capital, Pastor Peter said that it is not uncommon for Lenny to spend two to four hours talking to a church member in his office. While Lenny may not be the most gifted leader as far as understanding church systems, he has amassed a tremendous amount of trust from the people and from his staff. Peter depends on a lot of Lenny’s relational capital while Lenny depends on a lot of Peter’s leadership expertise.

During his interview Pastor Craig stopped the interview to greet and chat with a woman who needed access to the closet. He asked how she was doing and introduced her to the researcher. In that moment, she knew that her pastor cared enough to stop what he was doing and spend a couple minutes with her. After she left, Craig mentioned that she had been at the church since the sixties. She was not taken for granted.

Pastor Mike said that pastors have to prioritize ministry so that they have the time to love people; “Maybe it’s one less meeting, but one more opportunity to love people in some other way.” Mike once received a phone call at 10:00 p.m. from a member’s son who had been in a severe car accident and would likely lose his legs. Mike’s Senior Pastor, Jerald, asked him, “What do you think?” Mike said, “Yeah, let’s go.” Mike had to teach Sunday School the next day and Jerald had to preach but they went anyway. They didn’t get home till 2:00 a.m. Mike said, “The family was humbled and couldn’t believe we were there for them in such a time of stress. Things like that build trust like you can’t imagine.”

Pastor Mike summed up his view on trust, “When you can pass a \$1.4 million dollar budget in 10 minutes from your congregation, you know that the people just trust the way the funds are being used and what’s happening and what’s going on.”

Training and Observation

Training provides a platform of observation for leaders to see themes and trends in their churches. Seven out of nine of the leaders interviewed mentioned the importance of training in their ministries. The two leaders that did not mention training most likely did not mention it because they were not responsible for that area of ministry.

At Faithway Church, Pastor Lenny said that each new leader participates in a year and a half cohort. They also call in outside mediators to work through very difficult situations. Every year, the board picks a leadership theme to study when the elders meet.

Susie, at Backway Church, stresses the importance of studying collaborative leadership because “seminaries don’t teach you this stuff.” With a sparkle in her eye she said,

You have to watch it happen, you have to be a part of the process, you have to hear stories, and you have to know the players well. I’ve read every book on team development that’s been written. I train myself in a sense, but I went to workshops. I’m bent toward it, I’m fascinated by it and every church has somebody who’s good at it, find out how that is. Who can facilitate that process?

Jerald, the Senior Pastor of Highway Church, prioritizes business time, teaching time, and pleasure time with his staff and elders. In relation to teaching, he only asks his elders to read one book a year and is convinced that even “highly educated, highly motivated elders don’t read the books he wants them to read.” So, Jerald often will summarize a book that he wants them to read and then gives them a brief book report on the main points as a way to promote discussion.

Pastors utilize time to cultivate collaborative relationships with their boards by building trust with each other, building trust with their congregation, and by training. Spending pleasurable time with board and staff is a crucial part of knowing what they are thinking and feeling. These pastors spend a considerable amount of time with their congregation. They prepare their sermons and finish their responsibilities ahead of time for the sake of spending time with people. Training is also an important part of building trust with each other. All three churches have different types of on-going training. Training allows the leaders to observe patterns and themes with each other and the

church. Time invested in each other, in the congregation, and in training produces high levels of trust that are necessary for making good decisions on particular initiatives and for leadership longevity.

In summary, the case studies highlighted important principles surrounding change initiatives, conflict and timing. The change initiative principles include: understanding who initiates change, church growth dynamics, staffing issues, developing concentric circles of buy-in, and delegating authority. The conflict principles include: maintaining a “not about us” mentality, calling personal and team fouls, guarding and opening the gate of leaders, and having a “no surprise” policy. The timing principles include: taking the time to develop trust with boards, trust with congregations, and participating in ongoing training and observation.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore how pastors cultivate collaborative leadership on church boards. Young pastors often do not have the experience or training to lead their boards collaboratively. Veteran pastors can also overlook the importance of sustaining collaborative leadership. Both inexperienced and experienced pastors can cause great damage to themselves and their churches by neglecting this area of ministry. Three research questions guided this study:

1. How do pastors utilize change initiatives to cultivate collaboration with their boards?
2. How do pastors utilize conflict to cultivate collaboration with their boards?
3. How do pastors utilize timing to cultivate collaboration with their boards?

Each of the three churches interviewed had unique struggles and were different in stages of growth, size, and staff numbers. Faithway Church is a medium-sized church with three staff pastors. Highway Church is a large church with eight staff pastors. Backway Church is a very large church with over fifty-three staff members. Each church weathered resistance to change and saw growth over the last decade. The case studies discovered important collaborative principles like understanding who initiates change, church growth dynamics, staffing issues, developing concentric circles of buy-in, delegating authority, maintaining a “not about us” mentality, calling personal and team fouls, guarding and opening the gate of leaders, having a “no surprise” policy, and taking the time to develop relational trust through training and observation. The literature

covered the issues of who initiates change, the nature of change – including adaptive, technical, and sovereign change, the nature of healthy and unhealthy conflict, emotional intelligence of self and others, the risks of misjudging timing factors, and the importance of building trust.

Discussion of Findings

Utilizing Change Initiatives to Cultivate Collaborative Boards and Staff

In understanding how pastors utilize change initiatives to cultivate collaborative board leadership, the interviewees from the various churches and the literature have valuable insights into how change is initiated.

Understanding Change Initiators

Larry Osborne, in his book *The Unity Factor*, says that the senior pastor should be the primary initiator within the church regardless of age, intelligence, spirituality, or force of personality, even though other people in the church may surpass him in those areas. Osborne says the senior pastor should be the primary initiator based on time and training. He makes the case that no one else has the time to see the patterns and study the issues of ministry as the pastor does.¹⁸³ Osborne adamantly believes that if congregants do not view the senior pastor as the primary initiator, unity will fall apart. In all three churches studied, the staff and congregation view the senior pastor as the primary initiator of the church.

Highway and Backway Churches have clearly defined the senior pastors' role as the primary change initiator of the church. At Faithway Church, however, Pastor Lenny experienced the tug of war over who was in charge. When the church's weekly

¹⁸³ Osborne, 67.

attendance averaged only sixty, one of the elders left the church because he thought that the board was the boss and the pastor was the employee. It took about three to five years for Lenny to be firmly recognized as the primary initiator.

Tim Keller said that the bigger the church, the more the staff leads it and the more the pastor is the primary initiator. Keller said that in a church of 200 people, “key opinion leaders” must be on board with decisions or else the pastor will experience trouble.¹⁸⁴ When Lenny’s church started to grow past sixty people, the opinion leaders had to give up authority or leave the church. Highway and Backway Churches settled the power struggle long ago, and their staff firmly leads the church now.

When I probed into who it is that primarily initiates change at Backway Church, I found a bit of a cat and mouse game. Susie initiated a lot of change within her church, including major staff reconfigurations and a big church wide outreach emphasis. While Craig is the primary initiator, Susie has a lot of room to initiate change. Because they work so closely and well together, it is sometimes hard to tell who is initiating the changes. Neither Craig nor Susie care about who gets their own way; they are more concerned about what’s best for the church. Craig and Susie do not go ahead with an idea if they do not see eye-to-eye on the issue. They trust each other too much to do that.

Pastor Jerald of Highway Church seemed to be the most authoritative leader of everyone interviewed. He believes that everyone should know that the senior pastor carries “the stick,” referring to the authority to fire people. Yet, even Jerald is very careful to make sure his elders and staff agrees with his decisions or else he says, “You’re just begging for trouble.” Even though Jerald had the most dominate personality, he did not make decisions on his own. He carefully collaborates. For instance, when Jerald

¹⁸⁴ Keller, 6.

presents a new vision, he works it through the entire church system, starting with his board and staff, before they initiate any new change. Unlike Pastor Jerald, Pastor Randy Pope at Perimeter Church establishes vision all by himself on a mountain, like Moses. If Pastor Randy's mountain vision is rejected then he says he will leave the church. Pastor Jerald does not operate that way. If his ideas or visions are rejected, he tosses them out and reworks them.

Pastor Randy Pope is the most hieratical of all the pastors studied in the literature and the case studies. He believes that the church's vision should come only from him. Yet, Randy is careful to say that his vision should always be confirmed by a group of elders to ensure that he is not acting in an autocratic way.¹⁸⁵ Bill Lawrence, pastor and author of *Effective Pastoring*, takes the greatest care in making sure that even initial ideas or visions are mutually created together with the pastor and elders or staff.¹⁸⁶ In Pastor Lenny's church, being the change initiator does not mean that Lenny has all the original ideas. Pastor Lenny's wife, who is a visionary, often gives ideas for Lenny to chew on and then he will introduce them to the board. While Larry is the primary initiator, he is not the primary source of all initiatives.

Change Initiatives Are a Process Not an Event

Ronald Heifetz, in his book *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* says, "While technical problems may be very complex and critically important, they have known solutions that can be implemented by current knowhow. Adaptive challenges, however, can only be addressed through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and

¹⁸⁵ Pope, 71.

¹⁸⁶ Lawrence, 149.

loyalties.”¹⁸⁷ In both the literature and in the three churches studied, changes are a marathon rather than a sprint to the finish line. This marathon required lots of time, staying power, and endurance.

At Faithway Church, the transition from a small church to a medium sized church took about nine years. They had to do the hard work of looking at the church system, creating new structures of leadership, changing by-laws, hiring extra staff, and struggling through different authority issues. Senior Pastor Lenny learned to stop making “free-reign” decisions, realizing that his decisions affected many people. Both Peter and Lenny are still in the process of changing the values and beliefs of their church, so the church will begin to embrace small group ministries at a church wide level. Leadership is an ongoing iterative process at Faithway Church.

Adaptive Issues of Church Growth and Staffing

The leaders’ ability to evaluate the size of their church and the players involved allows them to lead collaboratively. Pastor Craig of Backway Church has seen the most diversity in church size out of all the pastors in the case studies. He started in a small church and now ministers in a very large church. When he ministered in a small church, decisions were made around “the pine tree.” Then Craig moved to a medium sized church with a few staff members that eventually grew into a larger church with over fifty-three staff members. He reminds us that the “game changes.” Tim Keller warns pastors that they must be careful not to practice large church leadership in small churches and vice versa.¹⁸⁸ Different sizes require different approaches to collaboration.

¹⁸⁷ Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, 19.

¹⁸⁸ Keller

Susie, the Director of Team Ministries at Backway Church, discovered that as her church leadership grew, they had to create different levels of collaboration or else there would be no collaboration at all. This necessary, but painful, change meant that not all the leaders had the senior pastor's ear. Susie created a second level of management so that only a few people would report back to the pastor and senior staff. Many of the leaders felt a sense of loss of power when they were no longer able to report to the senior pastor and staff. While some are still upset about it today, most discovered a greater sense of freedom in decision making and collaboration. This loss of influence in the midst of change was a common theme in all the churches studied. It is important that church leaders identified and expressed empathy towards those who experience loss for the sake of moving ahead together.

Establishing Circles of Buy-in

A key principle in effective leadership is making sure that a change initiative is owned by the top level leaders, by those of whom the change will most directly impact, and by the majority of the congregation. Failure to discern these levels of buy-in will prove to be disastrous. Taking the time to cast vision and listen to people's objections or questions is part of the adaptive process. If a change initiative is not ripe at the leadership level, it behooves the senior pastor to wait until it is thoroughly digested and accepted before promoting it beyond the board or staff.

Delegating Authority

Pastor Joey of Backway Church described the danger of micromanaging pastors, "They always have to have their finger in the mix, and they don't create freedom for people to risk, fail, and own something." In order for pastors to utilize any particular

change initiative they learned to delegate authority to multiply their ministry. Pastor Lenny and his elder Tim, out of all the nine leaders studied, struggled the most in delegating authority and ownership to others.

The literature and the three senior pastors of the churches studied all suggest that the primary change initiators are senior pastors. While this looks a bit different in each church, the senior pastor, staff, and the elders agree upon their respective roles so they work collaboratively. If the pastor, staff, or elders jostle over power, the struggle will slow down or ruin ministry. All leaders in the study were keenly aware that God is ultimately the greatest change initiator. There was not one magical moment or piece of technology that created great change in any of the three churches researched. Instead, change was a slow, iterative, ongoing process of day to day ministry. The adaptive issues that all the leaders work hardest at are: understanding church growth dynamics and staffing issues, establishing concentric circles of buy-in so new change initiatives can move ahead, and delegating authority so that ministry can grow beyond particular leaders. These changes do not happen overnight, and they are not easy.

Utilizing Conflict to Cultivate Collaboration with Boards and Staff

One of the biggest challenges that the nine leaders face is dealing with conflict so that they grow closer together rather than further apart. Alan Nelson and Gene Appel, in their book *How to Change Your Church* say, “Any significant change initiative in a church is going to create conflict, bottom line.”¹⁸⁹ Pastor Craig of Backway Church says, “I never anticipate doing anything without resistance. There will always be resistance. It’s human nature.” First Peter 4:12 says, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful

¹⁸⁹ Nelson and Appel, 227-229.

trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.” Both the literature and the senior pastors agree that conflict is a common experience in the ministry. Most of the leaders interviewed view conflicts as opportunities to grow together as leaders and to help the church advance.

Daniel Goleman, in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, highlights the importance of self control. He says that the word emotion means, “to move” and is a great force that determines a leader’s ability or inability to control themselves and lead others.¹⁹⁰ The data from the interviews agrees with Goleman as many of the leaders learned to control themselves in very difficult situations. This emotional intelligence includes recognizing their own emotions and also recognizing how people around them are feeling or reacting. Peter Steinke, in his book *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, talks about remaining personally calm in the midst of conflict, staying connected to others who are anxious, and still being courageous to deal with the issues at hand. Most of the nine leaders interviewed live exemplary lives with regards to these qualities. However, Tim, from Faithway Church, avoids conflict like the plague.

Calmness, Calling Fouls and Emotional Intelligence of Self

Susie, the Director of Team Ministry at Backway Church, demonstrated a high level of emotional intelligence when she said, “If I’m out of line in a meeting, or feel like I got kind of emotional, I’ll either apologize to the group, very openly, or if it was about one person, I’ll pull them aside and say, ‘I’m really sorry.’” For church leaders,

¹⁹⁰ Goleman, 81.

cultivating a self-awareness to name what is going on in their hearts and recognizing how their behavior is affecting other people is crucial in utilizing conflict. Pastor Lenny was one of the most impulsive pastors interviewed. He once slammed his fist on the table and walked out of an elder meeting. Thankfully, he came back in and apologized. His ability to recover from that blow up by apologizing quickly saved the day. Since then, Lenny has been more careful at monitoring his own heart by recognizing emotions before they negatively affect others around him. Pastors can only slam the table so many times before they will not be sitting at the table any longer. Pastor Mike, from Highway Church said that he cannot remember a time when anyone raised their voice in a board meeting.

Connectedness or Emotional Intelligence of Others

In building concentric circles of buy-in, Pastor Jerald of Highway Church carefully assessed how other people reacted and felt about the change initiatives of a satellite church. By doing so, he accounted for the emotional intelligence of others. Jerald paid careful attention to different groups of people starting with his own elders and staff as he pushed the initiative forward. Pastor Peter of Faithway Church wisely recognized that his church was not ready to take a position on complementarian leadership, so he backed away from the issue rather than forcing it. If he had pushed the issue forward, Peter would have damaged the church. Now, because of his sensitivity, the issue resolved itself. Pastor Joey of Backway Church almost lost his job when his attitude towards other ministries in the church was “screw everything else” except his own student ministries. He is now much more aware of what is going on around him, how he is impacting others, and what they are feeling and thinking.

Courage to Apply Emotional Intelligence by Moving Towards Conflict

Pastors who collaborate well do not ignore conflict; they deal with it up front. Before making the difficult decision to let his pastor of worship go, Pastor Jerald, directly discussed the problems with the pastor of worship over a period of time. However, the pastor of worship's wife felt deeply hurt and disconnected from what was happening. Jerald admits that if he would have been more aware of her feelings, he could have talked to her sooner and alleviated a lot of tension. Thankfully, he had the courage to meet with her directly. She asked Jerald some tough questions about why he was letting her husband go. Jerald had good answers, and she began to understand the hard reality. In the end, their relationship was saved, and the transition did not hurt the church.

Pastors Lenny and Peter of Faithway Church also demonstrate the courage to deal with issues upfront. Peter says,

Lenny and I go round and round in our staff meeting. Lenny and I are like a married couple, we can argue and debate and I looked at him flatly in our staff meeting this morning and said, "Lenny, you're wrong, you're just plain wrong." I said that boldly, but we have the relational ability that I can communicate like that with him in a way that doesn't damage our relationship long-term.

Heifetz says that in a highly adaptive organization "no issue is too sensitive to be raised . . . and no questions are off limits," and "hidden perspectives get put on the table fairly quickly."¹⁹¹

Guarding and Opening the Gate of Leadership

Another key factor in utilizing and preventing conflict is guarding the gate of leadership. Larry Osborn, pastor and author of *The Unity Factor* says,

I've learned that as the leadership board goes, so goes the rest of the church. If we're at war in the board room, it doesn't matter how well things are going in the church at large. If the fighting doesn't stop, eventually there will be a coup d-etat

¹⁹¹ Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, 102.

or a resignation....¹⁹² It's too late to try to build unity after we've allowed a contentious or divisive person on the board. The damage has been done. I've found there is only one cure. We have to guard the gate.¹⁹³

Susie, the Director of Team Ministry at Blackway Church, agrees, "Choose who you are collaborating with very carefully." In all three churches guarding the gate proved to be a crucial part of maintaining unity.

The Apostle Paul, wrote extensively on the importance of selecting qualified men to the leadership positions of the church.¹⁹⁴ Paul stressed that elders must be carefully selected based on two issues: godly character and competency. Elders must not have any glaring character issues, and they must also be "able to teach" and able to "manage his family." This selection process and guarding the gate of leadership is so important that Paul writes about it both in I Timothy 3 and in Titus 1.

Sometimes church leaders are confronted with the difficult challenge of dealing with an unqualified leader. Pastor Lenny learned the hard way after he begged a divisive elder to stay on the board. Being a people pleaser, Lenny feared what would happen if one of his elders resigned. Lenny realized that he should have opened the gate earlier and let the rogue elder resign. In the long run the elder's resignation was better for the board and his church. Lenny still struggles with people pleasing people, but he has learned that it is sometimes best to let a leader go who is not on board with the vision of the church. He refers to this lesson as "addition through subtraction."

It's Not About Us

Both the literature and the case studies confirm that pastors who utilize conflict effectively are not in the ministry for themselves. These leaders really believe that the

¹⁹² Osborne, 14-15.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 33.

¹⁹⁴ I Timothy 3:2-5.

church is not about them. Many of the leaders interviewed commented on the humility of their working partners. Susie captured the “not about us” attitude the best when she described how the younger pastors in her church are often very competitive and want to be in the top dog positions. In contrast, she reflected on how it has never been her goal to be in a top position nor to maintain that position, but rather to server her church. Speaking on behalf of the top leaders she said, “We don’t care if we’re in that position or not and we don’t care about our future.” What they do care about is that their church flourishes.

Jim Collins, in his book *Good To Great*, noted the same theme when he studied great business leaders. He says,

As a Level 5 leader said, “I want to look out from my porch at one of the great companies in the world someday and be able to say, ‘I used to work there.’” In contrast, the comparison companies [companies that didn’t make the greatness cut] that were concerned more with their own reputation for personal greatness, often failed to set the company up for success in the next generation.¹⁹⁵

Jim Collins and his research team were shocked at what Level 5 leaders look like. He describes them saying,

Compared to high-profile leaders with big personalities who make headlines and become celebrities, the good-to-great leaders seem to have come from Mars. Self-effacing, quiet, reserved, even shy – these leaders are a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will. They are more like Lincoln and Socrates than Patton or Caesar.¹⁹⁶

While not all business applications are helpful in a church setting, I believe this one really drives the point home that great leaders in the church and in the world care more about the success of the their company or church than their own career.

¹⁹⁵ Collins, 26.

¹⁹⁶ Collins, 12-13.

It is not surprising that throughout the gospels, Jesus constantly had to deal with the self-centered egos of his own disciples. The disciples constantly focused on their own ambitions and positions rather than a common mission. Bill Lawrence, a seasoned pastor and author of *Effective Pastoring*, calls the disciple's propensity towards conflict and competition the "dreaded leader's disease."¹⁹⁷ While the disciples argued over who would be the greatest, Jesus calmly addressed them by saying, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servants and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."¹⁹⁸ Jesus taught the disciples not to compete against each other but to compete for each other by serving each other.¹⁹⁹

Good-to-great church leaders can turn conflict into opportunity because they don't make themselves the issue. They are aware of competitive forces, are able to address them head on, and are able to remain focused on their mission. They really believe that the ministry is "not all about us."

The literature and the three churches studied found that pastors utilized conflict to cultivate collaborative boards by being emotionally intelligent, by calling personal fouls, by having the courage to call team fouls, by guarding and opening the gate of leadership, and by maintaining a "not about us" attitude.

Utilizing Timing to Cultivate Collaborative Boards and Staff

Both the literature and the research agrees that without a keen sense of timing a pastor risks making decisions that will either implode or be ignored. Poorly timed decisions are a result of not taking the time to build concentric circles of buy-in and trust.

¹⁹⁷ Lawrence, 35.

¹⁹⁸ Matthew 20:26-28.

¹⁹⁹ Matthew 20:25.

Alan Nelson and Gene Appel, the authors of *How to Change Your Church* say, “Church splits and intense combustion are nearly always reserved for congregations that have not considered the elements of timing, readiness, leadership, and size of change.”²⁰⁰

Timing and Building Trust

Timing is not a matter of luck or the roll of the dice. Timing is the leader’s ability to assess relationship capital so that decisions do not harm board relationships or church momentum. Steven Covey, in his book *The Speed of Trust*, reminds leaders that the key ingredient to good timing in any organization is trust. Without trust, everything slows down and becomes more expensive both personally and financially. With high levels of trust, decisions can be made more efficiently and ministry becomes less expensive. He calls it the “speed of trust” or the “trust formula.”²⁰¹

Building Trust By Becoming Friends

Peter, at Faithway Church, commented on the importance of building trust with his board. When he was struggling in his marriage, his board was such a trusting place that he could tell them about his struggles, and they sent him on a marriage retreat. Pastor Jerald of Highway Church said it is his goal to “mix business with pleasure” in order to cultivate trust with his elders. Pastor Joey of Backway Church, said that he was “serious” about getting to know his elders personally. Pastor Lenny of Faithway Church said that he ranks spending time with his elders right up with preparing the Sunday morning sermon. The literature and the research prove that ministry success has less to do with luck or intelligence, but rather the pastor’s ability to develop trust and camaraderie with fellow leaders.

²⁰⁰ Nelson and Appel, 228-229.

²⁰¹ Covey, 13.

Longevity in Leadership Friendship

This study showed that for trust to develop there has to be longevity in leadership. Trust does not develop overnight. All of the nine leaders, except one, have been ministering in their setting for over nine years, and five of them have been ministering in their setting for almost two decades. They built up a tremendous level of trust with their fellow leaders and with their congregations. Rick Warren, commenting on his leadership team at Saddleback Church, says that all of his senior leadership are “lifers” and are “committed to growing old together.” Warren does not describe his relationships with his fellow elders and pastors as work relationships but rather as “close friendships and personal commitment to each other for life.”²⁰² Just like a good marriage between a husband and wife is defined by ongoing communication and love, so it is with church leaders who effectively collaborate together.

On Going Training and Observation

All the authors of the literature believe in leadership training as a way to build collaborative boards, otherwise they would not have written their books. Most of the authors and all three of the senior pastors in this study are practicing on-going training with their boards and staff. The training varies from reading books, going on retreats, having board meetings in homes, forming cohorts, and attending conferences or workshops. This training creates unhurried time where pastors and leaders can listen to each other, get to know each other, and think about their churches in ways that they could not do alone. Trust is developed in these training contexts.

²⁰² Myra and Shelly, 152.

If pastors build camaraderie and trust, they can see the landscape of their church more clearly. By watching and listening to what people are saying, the pastor can learn when to move ahead with issues and when to slow it down. This sense of timing is crucial.

Susie, from Backway Church shares a timing illustration that she often uses with her staff. She says,

For perfect pot of tea you have to get the water just right, you pour it in and if you wait three minutes, it's great, if you wait five minutes, it's bitter. If you let it steep too long, it gets bitter, if you wait two minutes, it's like water. So, do you need to let it steep, or do you need to pour it off? If you let it steep too long, it gets bitter, but if you pour it off too soon, it's watered down.

Nehemiah, the cupbearer exemplified skill in timing. Before he accomplished his great feat of rallying forces to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, he carefully developed significant relational capital with key people and assessed the political dynamics of the land. He seized the moment, not because he was lucky but because he wisely assessed the opportunity and timing. He knew timing had everything to do with trust and careful observation of the spirit of the times.

The literature and the nine leaders studied in this research all agree that timing is not a matter of magic or luck of the draw, but rather a long process of churches growing together. Part of this growth in trust involves getting to know each other as friends, being committed together for the long term, being committed to on-going training, and carefully observing the lay of the land.

Last Words and Recommendations

Pastors can learn to lead collaboratively. Having studied the literature and the case studies, I would like to make some suggestions that can help pastors cultivate collaborative leadership on their church board.

First, pastors should not assume they are the primary change initiators of the church. Especially in a smaller church, be savvy in assessing who are the formal and informal leaders of the church. There are elected leaders who hold obvious places, but then there are the non-elected leaders that may have most of the power and pull within the church. If pastors do not recognize who these players are, they could find themselves in trouble. Taking the time to understand who has the power of influence and then collaborating with those people is essential. Susie, at Backway Church said, “You have to know the players well.” Walk slowly among the people so you understand these dynamics. Remember, the larger the church is the more the pastor is the primary initiator.

Second, pastors should never go ahead with an initiative unless their elders have considered the issues and support the initiative. I think one of the main reasons why there is such a high pastoral turnover rate is because young and old pastors alike underestimate how important it is to learn to collaborate with their board. Listening to elders and key leaders within the church takes a tremendous amount of time and energy. In most cases, a senior pastor should never push a major change initiative to the congregational level if there is not one hundred percent buy-in from the board and staff. This principle is even more important to consider if your church is smaller in size.

Pastors should not assume a change initiative has board or church wide buy-in. Many young pastors or transitioning pastors are surprised to discover that what was said

during the interview process by the search committee or by a select number of church leaders does not always accurately represent the board's positions. This was the case for Pastor Peter of Faithway Church. The search committee told him that the church was ready to transition from an egalitarian board to a complementarian board. However, when Peter arrived, some of the elders were unapologetically egalitarian in their views. During interviews, spend extra time with the leaders that you will be collaborating with. Pastors should ensure that they know these key leaders as best as they can before they accept a call. If they accept the call, at least they will have a heads up for the issues that will demand their time and sacrifice. I often say, with a smile on my face, "A pastor takes his first church because he is desperate for a job, his second church because he does not know any better, and finally the third church because he is beginning to learn how to collaborate."

Third, pastors should adopt a no surprises policy. Pastors must labor to ensure that no decision surprises their board, staff, or any other person who is directly affected by the decision. When people are surprised, it often makes them feel uninformed and unimportant. Surprises can cause instant conflict and loss of trust. An idea should be carefully worked through the system by talking to the leaders and individuals of whom the decision will impact.

I was once surprised when an elder, who served on our board, objected to a proposal in a congregational meeting that he had earlier voted to propose. He shocked and embarrassed the entire board when he stood up in the meeting and opposed the effort. We thought he was on our side, but he was not. He failed to communicate how he really felt, and I failed to read his non-verbal expressions. It made the board look divided at the

annual meeting and created harmful drama. Thankfully, he also surprised us with his resigned a few months later.

Fourth, pastors should expect resistance and call personal fouls. Conflict is a common part of ministry that all leaders must anticipate. Alan Nelson says, “Any significant change initiative in a church is going to create conflict and if a church is so ready for improvement that no conflict emerges, it means that significant fruit has been lost.”²⁰³ If an initiative experiences no resistance, it is way past due. Once I started a small group ministry and was surprised to find that there was no resistance. It was the easiest ministry I had ever started. The reason that it was so easy, is because it was way over do. It should have been started ten years earlier. People were falling through the seams of the church for many years. However, if an initiative is timed well, a pastor can expect resistance. While a pastor should work hard at building concentric circles of buy-in and trust he must never wait for every one in the church to give his or her consent.

Pastors must learn to call personal fouls. By calling personal fouls, pastors can gain credibility and respect from their boards. All nine leaders interviewed were willing to admit their mistakes and take ownership for their actions. If pastors do not admit their mistakes, their elders will not be willing or feel safe to admit their own mistakes. Real issues will get buried and without dealing with real issues, real ministry suffers. Pastors must learn to say, “I’m sorry.”

Fifth, pastors must remain calm, connected and courageous. Philippians 4:6 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”²⁰⁴ By remaining calm, a pastor can turn

²⁰³ Nelson and Appel, 227-229.

²⁰⁴ Philippians 4:6.

conflict into an opportunity to win others over and see the situation clearly. By remaining calm, a pastor can stay connected to those who are in opposition and still listen to what they are saying. This may mean having coffee with angry elders rather than avoiding them. By staying connected, the pastor might discover that their complaints and concerns are warranted. A pastor may also realize that their perceived enemies are really loyal advocates who simply have the courage to speak up. By remaining calm, pastors can also have the courage to make decisions and move forward in the midst of anxiety rather than freezing up.

Scott Walker, governor of Wisconsin and son of a Baptist preacher, became embroiled in a political fire storm in 2011. He pledged to slash the budget, in part by cutting union benefits. Between forty-thousand and sixty-thousand people began protesting at the capitol building against Walker and his proposals. Walker said, “Obviously these guys have a right to be heard, but this is still a small fraction of the percentage of all state and government workers. I can’t let these voices overpower the voices of the millions of other taxpayers I represent.”²⁰⁵ Reminiscing on a political experience in 2003, Walker said, “I literally had protesters from the unions in the chambers standing up during my speech holding signs . . . I had people catcalling and the whole bit; I’m used to it.” Walker remained very calm in the midst of the chaos. When he was asked about the intense conflict and pressure surrounding his proposals he said, “I sleep all right.”²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Brady Dennis, “Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker has history of going up against unions,” *Washington Post*, 19 February 2011.

²⁰⁶ Brady Dennis, “Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker has history of going up against unions,” *Washington Post*, 19 February 2011.

Sixth, pastors must guard and open the gate of leadership. For pastors, nothing is as important as paying close attention to who is brought on the board or staff. Pastors must establish leadership training so that potential leaders can spend significant amounts of time with the current leaders. Spending significant time in training helps current leaders to assess a particular candidates' gifts, theology, philosophy of ministry, and whether or not they play well together with other people. The board in smaller churches and the staff in larger churches should act as the nominating committee for leadership positions. It makes little sense to have a member at large, who does not know pertinent issues, to be on the nominating committee. Only pastors and elders, called by God, should be the ones to guard the gate of leadership.

When Paul wrote about guarding the gate in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1, he was writing to Timothy and Titus as pastors. Paul gives Timothy and Titus the primary authority of selecting future leaders. They were to do this based on the biblical qualifications of godly character and competency. In many smaller churches "nice guys," who are not that competent, often end up in leadership positions. In larger churches, very competent men who have character issues, often end up in leadership positions. Pastors must tenaciously pay attention to who they elect.

Opening the gate of leadership is just as important as guarding it. There are times when pastors inherit a rogue elder or elect an elder who later turns out to be a bad choice. This can make board collaboration seem impossible. In my experience, if the rogue elders do not come around and play nice, they will eventually resign from the board and/or leave the church on their own initiative. In a smaller church, the senior pastor is asking for trouble if he asks the person to leave, especially if the elder is a tinder box or

politically volatile. In a difficult situation like this the pastor must have an extremely high level of emotional intelligence and wait until the elder rotates off or resigns.

Seventh, pastors must spend unhurried time with elders developing trust and relational capital. We all know what happens when a husband assumes he has his wife all figured out. Romance goes out the window. Good husbands spend quality time with their wives as they continue to listen to their struggles, desires, and dreams. Likewise, good pastors continually spend time with their elders and staff members, not because they have to, but because they really like them. Friendship is a key in collaboration. Spending unhurried time with elders and staff has great ministerial returns.

Developing relational capital will eventually help pastors when they need take a relational withdrawal from those they minister with. This withdrawal can happen either when they make a mistake or when they ask for greater levels of sacrifice during some initiative. I was playing basketball at the YMCA and got into a tussle with an opponent over a foul. It was his word against mine. I held the ball, purposely delaying the game, hoping he would give. As I held the ball, one of the other players said to me, "Give it to Jerry." The silence and the looks of most of them told me that they were on Jerry's side. I later found out that Jerry had been playing with them for years. I had only been playing with these boys for three weeks. It was a reminder of the importance of developing relational capital and trust. I had not developed any relational trust, and therefore they did not support me when push came to shove, even though I was right.

Eighth, pastors must become life-long learners. The moment pastors stop learning, they stop leading. If pastors believe that they have arrived, that they are now equipped for ministry, it is, in my opinion, a sign of pride. I know that when I graduated

from seminary with my Master of Divinity, I thought I was ready to conquer the world, feed God's people, and lead a revival. None of those things happened. I struggled in my first church. In a low season of my life and ministry, my wife gave me a push to start taking Doctor of Ministry classes. Over the next four years, as I took the classes, I found a treasure trove of leadership training that I desperately needed. On-going training is essential for the pastor because ministry and people are constantly changing. Pastors must continually be learning, analyzing, and observing. Susie, at Backway Church said that if a leader cannot learn, then they cannot lead. While pastors might have a M.Div., a D.Min., or many years of experience, they must not trust in these degrees and experience. The only thing they should trust is a humble spirit that is willing to learn how to lead his church in the next phase of ministry. Susie, who has studied leadership dynamics for the past two decades, reminds us about the art of collaboration when she said, "Seminaries don't teach you this stuff."

Ninth, pastors must remember that heroes happen overnight, but leaders take decades to develop. Collaborative leadership is a marathon, not a sprint. While King David became a hero overnight when he killed Goliath, he became a leader during the next couple decades as he recruited leaders, handled conflict, and established his kingdom. While Moses parted the Red Sea and led the Israelites out of Egypt in one night, he became a leader over the next forty grueling years in the desert, dealing with conflicts and resistant people. Research shows that over fifty percent of pastors quit the ministry after five years.²⁰⁷ Most of those who stay in the ministry, on average, only

²⁰⁷ Wood, 35.

remain in any single church for five years at a time.²⁰⁸ Unfortunately, most leaders do not begin to make a lasting impact on their churches until the five or six year mark. It takes time to build relational capital, and a team to build up a church that honors God. There are no hero pastors, but rather pastors must be humble enough to listen and learn from others around them and stubborn enough to make long term sacrifices.

This long-term leadership mentality is needed whether it be in ministry, sports, science, or business. Jim Collins says, in his book *Good to Great*, that while many people know John Wooden was the coach of the UCLA Bruins and won ten NCAA championship games, not many people know that it took him fifteen years before he won his first championship. What was he doing during that time? Wooden was “building the underlying foundations, developing a recruiting system, implementing a consistent philosophy, and refining the full court press style of play.”²⁰⁹ It took Einstein “ten years of groping through the fog to get the theory of special relativity.”²¹⁰ In 1945 Sam Walton had a single dime store. It took Sam twenty five years before Wal-Mart hit breakthrough status. In 1970 the store grew to a chain of thirty-eight Wal-Marts that eventually grew to over three thousand stores in 2000.²¹¹ So it is true in the churches studied. All of them saw good things happen over long periods of time. None of them experienced a singular miracle moment. They took the time to rely on each other.

²⁰⁸ Douglas Tilley, “What Are the Factors That Lead Pastors to Change Pastorates?” (D.Min. diss., Covenant Theological Seminary, 2003), 3.

²⁰⁹ Collins, 171-172.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 114.

²¹¹ Ibid., 191.

Even Michael Jordan's heroics would have been impossible without a team around him. Harry Reeder, author of *From Embers to a Flame*, talks about the power of cultivating collaborative leadership saying,

The only man in the history of basketball who was able to hold Michael Jordan under twenty points per game was Dean Smith, his college coach at North Carolina. Jordan scored fewer than twenty points per game there because Smith forced him to pass rather than shoot all the time. But in retrospect, Jordan has said that learning to pass was the greatest lesson he ever learned – one that was indispensable on his road to six NBA World Championships. Jordan also learned to celebrate after he scored by pointing to the player who had passed him the ball. So by sharing the work, and sharing the glory, he became the greatest ever.²¹²

Harry went on to say that good leaders are always reproducing themselves, “If you are a leader, anything you do by yourself is a waste of time.”²¹³ The hero pastor is more a myth than a reality. Great pastors are great passers.

Tenth, pastors must constantly monitor the pulse of the church and remember that it is not all about us. Collaborative leadership is an art. It is the art of watching people closely to see what they think, how they interact, and what they might do. This is the hard work that any pastor must do to stay close to his elders or staff. When pastors grow weary of paying attention, communicating, or dealing with inevitable conflicts, they will begin to make bad decisions. Their timing will be off, and they will be out of tune with what needs to happen in their church. If pastors remain connected to their leaders and people, they will be able to lead them collaboratively. Susie says collaboration is an art,

You have to watch it happen, you have to be a part of the process, you have to hear stories, and you have to know the players well. I've read every book on team development that's been written. I train myself in a sense, but I went to workshops. I'm bent toward it, I'm fascinated by it and every church has somebody who's good at it, find out who that is. Who can facilitate that process?

²¹² Reeder, 127.

²¹³ Ibid., 126.

Nathaniel Philbrick, in his book *Mayflower*, describes how the second generation of Indians and Pilgrims were responsible for King Philip's War. Edward Winslow, governor of the Plymouth Colony, and the Indian Sachem, King Philip, grew tired of the hard work of collaborating together, and this terrible mistake resulted in the deadly war called King Philip's War. While the generation of Pilgrims and Indians before them maintained relative peace and prosperity, Philbrick says, these two leaders exhibited poor leadership,

By refusing to acknowledge that Philip's troubles were also his troubles, Winslow was as responsible as anyone for King Philip's War. For peace and for survival, others must be accommodated. The moment any of them gave up on the difficult work of living with their neighbors – and all of the compromise, frustration, and delay that inevitably entailed – they risked losing everything. It was a lesson that Bradford and Massasoit had learned over the course of more than three long decades. That it could be so quickly forgotten by their children remains a lesson for us today.²¹⁴

Pastors must remember that it is not all about us. In order to lead a board or staff collaboratively so that the church can flourish, pastors must not have hidden agendas. They really must care more about God's church and their fellow leaders than about their own personal agenda. Pastor Danny of Highway Church summed it up well when he said, "God is the first and foremost and everything else kind of falls into place after that. I can't think of one staff member or elder who has a separate agenda that they are trying to push on our ministry."

Final Words

Pastors can learn to lead collaboratively by utilizing change initiatives, conflict and timing with their elders and staff. Because of the faithfulness of God working in and through our relationships we can experience resilient ministries. So let us not give up or

²¹⁴ Nathaniel Philbrick, *Mayflower* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 348.

lose heart in the ministry. Let us remember the courageous words of Joab, the Commander of King David's armies, "Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God."²¹⁵

Recommendations for Further Research

This study explored how pastors cultivate collaborative leadership on church boards. There are two particular areas that could be studied in much more detail. The difference of collaborating between lay elders and paid staff deserves more study. In all of the churches studied, each church had both lay elders and professional staff. Studying the differences could provide valuable insight for pastors in the future.

How pastors collaborate with their boards in very specific sized churches also deserves more study and could prove helpful to pastors. This study had a variety of different sized churches including a medium, large, and very large church. This was helpful in showing that the way a pastor collaborates has to change depending upon the size of the church. Because of limitations, the study did not specifically focus on any particular sized church. Future studies could hone in on a particular size. Studying exclusive groups of same sized churches could provide valuable insight for pastors in the future.

²¹⁵ 2 Samuel 10:12.

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

The following questions will be used during these interviews:

1. Can you tell me a bit of your history with this church? How did you end up here? Where were you before? How long have you been here?
2. What is the most significant challenge you and your board have faced leading this church?
 - A. Who were all the key players involved in the challenge? What were their key interests and loyalties and who promoted them?
 - B. Who initiates the change on your board or in your church? How quickly can change happen in your church? Is change viewed as a good thing?
 - C. Understanding that whenever people work together conflict occurs, “How did you respond to the conflict? How did you contribute to the conflict? How was this conflict processed within the board members?”
 - D. What did team members (including yourself) have to give up in order to collaborate?
 - E. How long did this whole issue take to be resolved? Did you feel some things were pushed through pre-maturely or too slowly? Did people feel that you were too fast or too slow? How long have you known your key leaders?
 - F. When the dust settled, what did you learn?
 - G. What advice would you give a pastor who was interested in learn how to lead his board collaboratively?

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