

## But Do You Want to Be a Transformational Leader?

A Travel Free Learning Article

By

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Do you want to be a transformational leader?

To those of us who are naturally assertive leaders, the answer is likely to be, "Well duh, yes!" But I have discovered in many years of work with pastors that many ministers are not assertive leaders. Many of us are in ministry because we are nurturers and enjoy the pastoral aspects of ministry, or we enjoy teaching or preaching. Of course, assertive leadership, pastoral care, teaching and preaching are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but neither do they automatically go together. Non-assertive leadership may have been better suited to the establishment church of the 1950's than to the rough and tumble world of the missional church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

One of the key questions for *congregations* thinking of seeking transformation, is, "Are we really ready and able to change?" A congregation that cannot genuinely say, "Lord, we are ready and able!" is unlikely to transform, no matter how good a process of transformation may be employed.

Likewise, ministers do well to ask the question, "Do I really want to be a transformational leader?" "Am I ready to do the hard work of leading a congregation that is a transformation process?"

I suppose some ministers think that transformational leadership is what they are paying a consultant/coach to do for them. But nobody can take the place of the transformational pastoral leader— together with lay transformational leaders. Pastors who want their congregations transformed have to do certain things: they have to create an environment that is friendly to transformation; they have to lead in the development of new vision (which is as much a spiritual undertaking as a strategic task); they have to deal creatively with inevitable conflict rather than avoiding it; they have to step out of the system regularly ("get up on the balcony", as Heifetz would say); they have to understand the difference between technical and adaptive change and the appropriate place of each in transformation; they have to motivate lay leaders for transformation.

As a coach-consultant for transformational change in congregations and other church organizations, I am often surprised at how many ministers leave in the midst of, or soon after, a transformation process which they have encouraged their congregation to undertake. It has led me to push ministers harder to ask before the process begins, "Am I ready and able to change the way I go about ministry?" It's a lot like "building a tower"—best to count the cost in advance to be as sure as you can that you have sufficient personal resolve and resources to finish the task once begun. It is unrealistic to expect the congregation to change and not to expect to have to change your own job description as well (and perhaps even your style). It is unfair to engage the whole congregation in a transformation process if you are not very sure about your own calling to be a transformative leader among them.

I grew up with an alcoholic parent. Therapists tell us this means the whole family system is affected. I can remember occasions when my father attempted to stop drinking. Though my mother consciously longed for him to stop drinking, when he actually did, she would badger him until he started again! I probably contributed to his drinking again myself, subconsciously just as my mother did.

A congregation that is stuck in a rut and in need of transformation is a lot like an alcoholic family. It is not enough for the pastoral leader alone to want to see change; the congregation has to want to see it as well. But neither is it enough for the congregation alone to change, the pastoral leader has to change as well. If either (or neither) changes, the entire process of transformation is undermined.

Up to 80 percent of American Christian congregations today need some significant transformation in order to become vital communities of faith again. *But do you want to be a transformational leader?* If not, you may need some time to pray and think with significant others about whether perhaps you *are* called to it or whether you should find an expression of ministry that does not require transformational leadership.

If you *do* perceive a call to transformational leadership, but haven't been able to really make a long-term commitment to it, perhaps you simply do not have the skills to be a transformational leader. They can be learned by most of us who feel called to it.

On the other hand, perhaps you perceive the call but you have become so discouraged in ministry that you are depressed, angry, or burned out to the point that the challenge to transformational leadership just seems out of reach. I have been there myself on more than one occasion and I have hated it each time. But I can also attest to the fact that there is help: friends, therapy, coaching, spiritual discipline that reconnects us to the Spirit who refreshes us (all resources that will be continually needed if you finally do say "yes" to the call to be a transformational leader).

Transformational leadership is tough work and not everyone is called to it. But if you *are* called to it, know that it will call on every gift you have and every resource you can muster. Better to begin gathering those resources in advance of beginning a process rather than being unable to "finish the race", which can be costly both to you personally and to your congregation. If you have to quit in the middle, it is forgivable and God will still love you. Thanks be to God! On the other hand, it's better to be as personally ready as possible before you begin a transformational journey with your institution.

At the least, I have discovered it is my calling as a coach-consultant for transformational leadership to raise these kinds of questions at the front end of a transformation process, to be sure that neither pastoral leaders nor congregations naively commit to the journey without self-examination and preparation.

You can read more about transformational leadership for the church in Dick Hamm's book, ***Recreating The Church: Leadership For The Post-Modern Age***, Chalice Press, 2007, part of the TCP Leadership Series.

### **Important Things to Know**

Dick Hamm is a Ministry Colleague with The Columbia Partnership. He is also executive administrator for Christian Churches Together in the USA. His most recent book is ***Recreating the Church: Leadership for the Post-Modern Era***. He is available for speaking and coaching with leaders, congregations, denominations, and parachurch organizations.

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