



Watch Out for Blind Spots!

A Travel Free Learning Article

by

Ken Kessler

Ministry Partner with The Columbia Partnership

Voice: 804.338.5058, E-mail: KKessler@TheColumbiaPartnership.org

Web Site: www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org

While driving the other day, I was talking with my son who is almost 16 years old and will be getting his driver's license soon. My fatherly sense of responsibility took over, and I was talking with him about how important it is to drive defensively and watch out for the other guy. As I was talking, I decided to change lanes on the interstate on which we were traveling. The car in front of me was just going too slow. I checked my rear view mirror and checked my side view mirror, and saw nothing. As I got ready to change lanes, a car horn loudly went off next to me. I quickly veered back over to my lane. Over in the lane next to me, the driver looked at me with one of those what-are-you-doing stares. (I think there may have even been a raised fist if I remember correctly.)

After my heart recovered and slowed down from the surprise appearance of that car in the left lane, my son then gave me a lecture about the importance of remembering the blind spots. He, with a smile on his face, reminded me that you must always be careful of those spots you cannot see from your rearview mirror or your side view mirror. Every car has blind spots!

Reflections on Blind Spots

I started reflecting about blind spots. We all have them; not only as we are driving in our cars, but also as we are living lives and sharing our ministries. We think we are aware of everything around us, but something surprises us that we did not see coming around the corner. People have them, and organizations have them also.

Otto Scharmer has written a book I picked up a few weeks ago on organizational change, and it discusses organizational and leadership blind spots. Scharmer is a Senior Lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and founding chair of ELIAS (Emerging Leaders for Innovation Across Sectors). I do not read many books by MIT lecturers, but this one caught my attention because of Scharmer's connection to Peter Senge, who has written so eloquently about new learning disciplines. The book, ***Theory U***, describes a process of innovation and systems change that is very intriguing and has remarkable similarities with the Spiritual Strategic Journey process pioneered by my Ministry Colleague, George Bullard.

As we experience this transitional world in which we live, Scharmer suggests that organizations have unique blind spots that make it difficult for them to make the transition to the emerging world of the future. When they face change, many organizations simply download their old patterns and maybe even take old ways of thinking and restructure a little, but rarely do they go deep into the inner resources of their existence to find a new way of living in this emerging world. His ***Theory U*** process tries to help organizations find those blind spots of old patterns, and dig deeper and rediscover and regenerate those inner roots in order to create these new patterns and actions.

What really caught my attention in the first part of the book was all the discussion about blind spots. What are those blind spots that we exhibit as ministers that inhibit our personal growth and development? What

are those blind spots that show up in churches each week that impact their living out their full Kingdom potential? Here are some that I have run into during my years of ministry:

- **The Blind Spot of Ministry Professionalism:** Kennon Callahan reminded me a few years ago that one of the biggest challenges for ministers is realizing that we no longer live in a church culture. Now we live on the mission field. We were trained in seminary to be vocational professionals who could handle all the elements of ministry—preaching, teaching, pastoral care, and administration. Somewhere along the way, some of us picked up the idea that God and the church could not do without our professional skills. Though Callahan wrote this more than a generation ago, we ministers still struggle at times with our ego and our personal need to live out our professional dream. While we need to be excellent at what we do and use some of those skills we learned, God has called us to serve a different world. Now, we must develop new skills to live in this emerging world. What new skills are you developing as we live this emerging future?
- **The Blind Spot of Misplaced or Worn Out Dreams:** Many of our churches are still living a dream of church life in the 1960s and 1970s, or even the 1980s. Others are living out a vision that was effective in another period of history in the church's life, but that is no longer valid. They keep downloading the old patterns of behavior, and these patterns no longer lead to vitality and vibrancy.
- **The Blind Spot of Control:** Think about how many churches are inflicted with leadership that is designed to control the movement of God's Spirit rather than be open to new movements and direction. When you see a church that has the same leadership today that it did over the last ten, twenty, or even thirty years, you get an idea that a blind spot is there.
- **The Blind Spot of Demographic Incongruity:** I visited with a church a few months ago that was determined that they were ready to minister to a new community of diverse people groups of 20 to 30-somethings. The only problem is that everyone in leadership and all the major programs of worship and discipleship were designed for people in their 50s and 60s; the majority of the leadership of their church. They could not see that their blind spot of wishing and hoping, but not producing ministry that would respond to the needs of younger age groups.
- **The Blind Spot of Discipleship Fatigue:** We love to talk about making disciples, but look at our practices. It sometimes seems we are more interested in making church members than growing engaged disciples of Christ. From the moment a new person shows up at our building, we want to make sure they join the club and be a contributing member. How engaging are we though in helping them develop the disciplines of walking alongside Christ in this Kingdom work? We have become so programmed in our response to people many times we forget our first responsibility is about a relationship to our Lord.
- **The Blind Spot of Gift Deployment and Service:** We are still filling slots in many of our churches rather than releasing people to ministry. But not only that, we sometimes are more interested in releasing people for ministry in the four walls of our church building and programs than releasing them to serve a community of people who need to see the love of Christ expressed outside the four walls of our buildings.

I could keep listing. These only begin to cover the blind spots I see in my journey. What blind spots do you see in your journey? May the Lord open our eyes to new discoveries and see things with entirely new eyes.

One of the most effective ways to discover our blind spots is to use a ministry leadership coach. My coach has helped me open my eyes to new places that God is working all around me. God uses her to ask powerful questions and engage me in powerful dialogue that opens up my blind spots. Your congregation or your leadership would benefit from investing in someone to come alongside you to help you see things

from a different perspective. Let us help you at The Columbia Partnership discover someone who can assist you as you see these blind spots of ministry and open your eyes to what God is doing around you.

A ministry leadership coach is a worthy investment.

Note: Join us Wednesday, September 7, at 2:00 p.m. EDT for the Travel Free Learning Dialogue as we discuss these blind spots. We also look forward hearing from you about additional blind spots you have seen in your ministry. We will also discuss the value of a coach in helping us discover our blind spots. If you miss this live dialogue, go to www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org and the Sharing Knowledge then Travel Free Learning Dialogues links to listen to the recording of this session.

Important Things to Know

Ken Kessler is a Ministry Partner with The Columbia Partnership and current president of the board of directors. He is also on the staff with the Virginia Baptist Mission Board where he serves as team leader for Empowering Leaders.

The Columbia Partnership is a non-profit Christian ministry organization focused on transforming the capacity of the North American Church to pursue and sustain Christ-centered ministry. **Travel Free Learning** is a sharing knowledge emphasis of TCP. For more information about products and services check out the web site at www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org, send an e-mail to Client.Care@TheColumbiaPartnership.org, or call 803.622.0923.