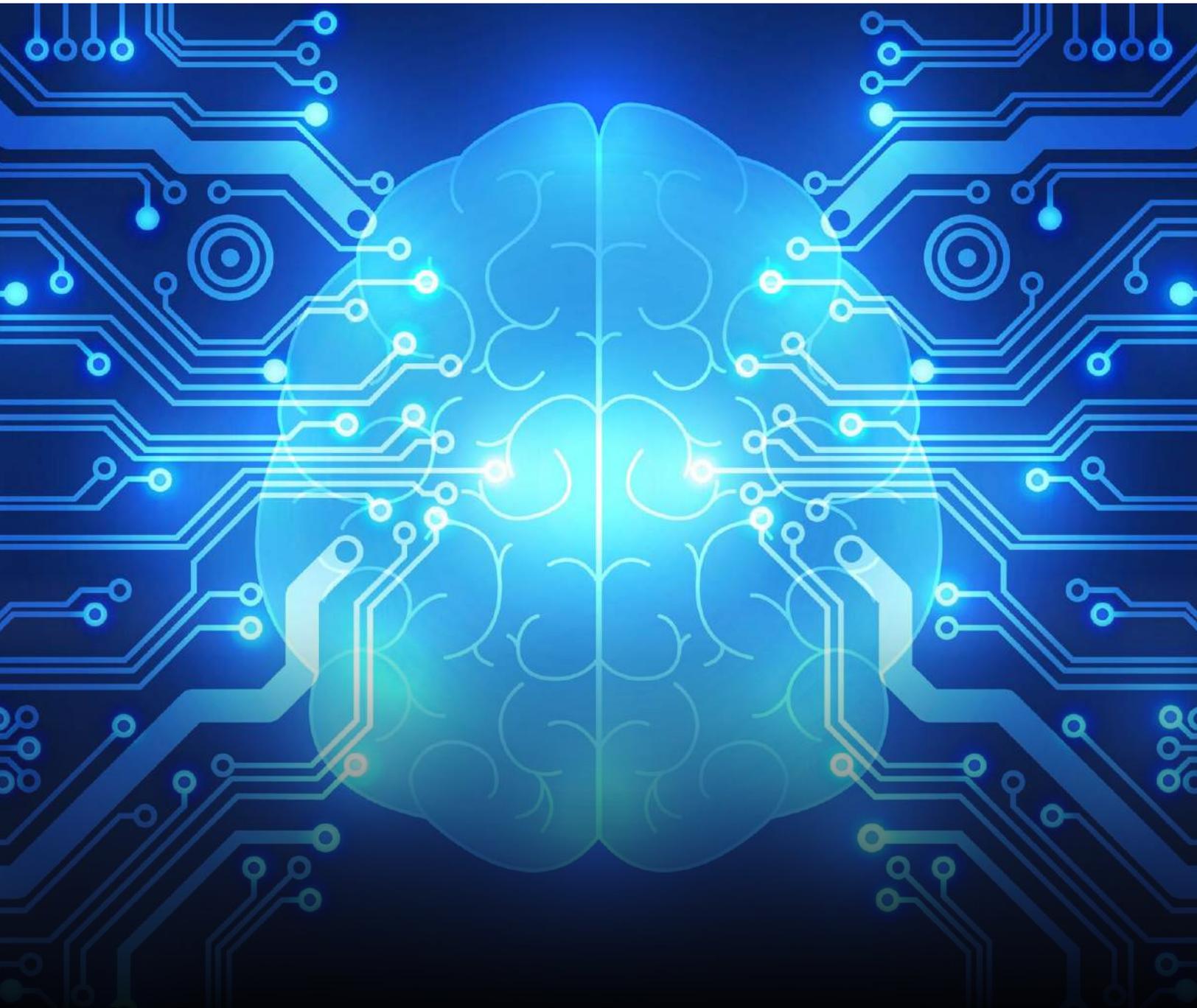


stuff you wish they taught in seminary

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6 Mindsets of Church Leaders
IN GROWING CHURCHES

RICH BIRCH



How you think about what you do in ministry is very important. The mindset you bring in to your ministry can be a make or break factor in your church's ability to impact your community. Over the last few years, I've had the honor of talking to hundreds and hundreds of [church leaders for my podcast](#) or my latest [book on church growth](#). Through my interaction with these leaders, I've started to sense that there are some common traits or mindsets among them. I see some common approaches to life and their ministries as I've interacted with them. Here is a collection of what I have observed and continue to pick up as I talk with these leaders. How do you resonate with these mindsets in your own leadership and ministry?

Time is Short

"Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom." - Psalm 90:12 (NLT)

One of the most striking similarities of church leaders who are leading thriving ministries is that they realize the fact that they have a limited amount of time to do what God has called them to do; in fact, they take this point very seriously. **There is an urgency in their actions that ripples through everything they do.** This drive is more intense than just an "entrepreneurial drive"; it is deeply rooted in a sense of the frailty of the human condition and their own limitations as leaders.

5 Signs That a Church Leader Knows Time is Short

- **Maximize Their Effort** // They are constantly asking if they are leveraging their time and energy with greatest efficiency to reach people with the message of Jesus. They know that time that is lost doesn't come back; hence, they are working passionately to maximize the time they do have.
- **Looking for Return on Kingdom Investment** // These leaders invest the resources they've been given to steward in a manner that helps them get optimal returns in changed lives. They don't spend resources (time, finances, people) in a haphazard manner, but are constantly focusing and refocusing on making new efforts.
- **Multiplication Focused** // These leaders are constantly seeking ways to multiply their efforts through leadership development and expansion of ministries. They are keenly aware that their ministry might be stymied with a bottleneck going forward and are therefore, looking to multiply their influence through lifting others up.
- **Next Generation Obsessed** // A sure sign that leaders are keenly aware of the brevity of life is that they are focused on passing the ministry onto the next generation. They know that because their own time is limited, they

need to consistently invest into those that are coming behind them.

- **Open to Innovation** // These leaders are constantly seeking better ways to “do” ministry. They find themselves attempting new approaches despite the underlying risks. They’re proactively involved in innovative approaches not for innovation sake, but for a deeper desire to reach more people for Jesus.

Come & See plus Go & Serve plus Stick & Stay

Leading churches are a curious mix of attracting people to their services while simultaneously sending people into the community to make a tangible difference, all while working hard to get people deeply plugged into community within the church. **This tension of being both a deep and wide church is common among churches which are making a difference today.** Church leaders from growing churches see themselves trying to balance out these tensions in perfect harmony. Here are some common elements of these aspects of ministry that we come across in many churches today:

Common Come & See Elements

- **Invites to weekend series.** // Churches will often develop compelling tools (physical & digital) that their people can use to invite their friends and family.
- **“Big day” strategy.** // Prevailing churches will take advantage of 3-4 Sundays every year as a key invite tool for their community. [\[ref\]](#)
- **Teaching that connects with real life.** // While remaining true to what the Bible says, these churches ensure that the teaching focuses on application on real life challenges facing their community.

Common Go & Serve Elements

- **Mass community outreach events** // A few times in a year, the church will work towards motivating a high percentage of it’s community to get out of their seats and go into the streets to make a difference. [\[ref\]](#)

- **Community Partnerships.** // These churches often partner with community service agencies who are looking to make a difference. The church provides volunteers and funding to these third-party organizations.
- **Talking about the poor.** // The New Testament makes it clear that the church is supposed to serve the “least among us.” These churches don’t shy away from calling people to live out this reality today.



Common Stick & Stay Elements

- **Regular volunteering onramp.** // On a consistent basis, successful churches are taking obvious next steps to getting plugged into a service opportunity within the church. [\[ref\]](#) Some even do it every week!
- **Circles are greater than rows.** // There is a healthy focus on the importance of “small groups” as the primary engine for care and growth of people in the church; this includes a robust strategy centered on getting people connected to groups.
- **Everybody is included!** // These churches stress that the church is for everyone and are doing everything they can to remove the barriers towards service and community.

Everything is an Experiment

“Let’s try it and see what happens.” Church leaders in growing churches see much of what they do as a learning process rather than opting for a settled

“best practice”. **They are constantly making small course corrections on much of what their church does.** They firmly hold the message of the church but are flexible enough to leave an open hand on how the church accomplishes its mission. They are more like scientists testing out new theories all the time than a baker executing the perfect recipe.

5 Areas to Experiment at Your Church (and not lose your job!)

We all would like to try out some new things at our church. Yet, we’re looking for “safe places” to take some risks before rolling them out for the rest of the church.

- **Kids Ministry** // I’ve said it before ... I’ll say it again ... the best ideas consistently come from kids and student ministry. These leaders are always turning out amazing new ideas.
- **Off Service Time** // Do you run a Saturday evening service? That would be a great place to try something new before moving into the “biggest service” on Sunday mornings.
- **Declared Experiment** // You’d be amazed how much leeway people will give you when you simply declare that you are trying something new and that you’re not committed to it long term.
- **Summer Time** // Most churches experience a small, temporary slump in momentum during the summer. This can be a nice time to fine-tune aspects of your ministry before the fall ramp up.
- **Today Not Tomorrow** // Seriously, what’s holding you back from trying something new today? Take some action on something you’ve been wondering about today, and see what happens!

Leadership Development Doesn’t Just Happen

“You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.”
- 2 Timothy 2:2 (NLT)

Prevailing churches are constantly raising new leaders at all organizational levels. They are constantly seeking ways to pass along leadership training through intentional mentoring, equipping and training. **They don’t see it as a “nice to have” part of what the church does but as core to what the church is.** In fact, when you look at where church leaders from growing churches spend their time, it’s on leadership development tasks. Take a closer look at 2 Timothy 2:2 above and try to pick out how many “generations” of people the message was passed onto? From the beginning of the church, creating new leaders has been a core function!



4 Ways to Integrate Leadership Development into Every Weekend at Your Church

- **Huddles** // Before your ministry teams head into whatever they are doing, ensure that they slow down and meet first. Use these times to pass on the vision of the church, build community within the team and train future leaders.
- **Evaluation Times** // Every time your church does something, remember that it’s a chance to build leaders through evaluation. Take your time to slow down and talk through what worked and what didn’t. Fostering a culture of open communication that encourages people to think critically about what is happening at the church is the first step towards empowering leadership.

- **“What to Expect” Documents //** Oftentimes, church leaders can get intimidated by the need for clear documentation to pass on what is happening at the church to new leaders. This doesn’t need to be the case! Simple documentation that answers the question “what can I expect when serving in this area” can be the starting point towards passing systems onto other people.
- **Find a book, get a group, talk about it. //** [Dan Reiland from 12 Stone Church](#) in Georgia demystifies leadership development when he breaks it down to simply picking a good book and then gathering a group of emerging leaders to talk about the book. We all can find time to do that, can’t we?

Private Disciplines Before Public Performance



When you get around leaders from growing churches, you’ll notice that they have a deep sense of faith at the core of what they do. In fact, **leaders of prevailing ministries know that their own faith, growth and development need to come before they even attempt to lead publicly.** They invest time, effort and energy into ensuring that their faith is unshakable, vibrant and growing. The old adage that you can’t take someone somewhere that you haven’t been has never been truer about leadership in the church today. These individuals are looking for ways to consistently apply the teaching of Jesus more deeply to their lives.

5 Quotes to Encourage You in Your Personal Development as a Church Leader

- “Remember who you are. Don’t compromise for anyone, for any reason. You are a child of the Almighty God. Live that truth.”
–Lysa Terkeurst
- “Our greatest fear should not be of failure but of succeeding at things in life that don’t really matter.”
–Francis Chan
- “He who lays up treasures on earth spends his life backing away from his treasures. To him, death is loss. He who lays up treasures in heaven looks forward to eternity; he’s moving daily toward his treasures. To him, death is gain.”
–Randy Alcorn
- “The Christian life is not a constant high. I have my moments of deep discouragement. I have to go to God in prayer with tears in my eyes, and say, ‘O God, forgive me,’ or ‘Help me.’”
–Billy Graham
- “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him”
–John Piper

Shift from Great Services to Great Systems

As a church starts to grow, the leadership needs to shift its attention from “doing the weekend right” to building and perfecting systems in order to accomplish that outcome. **In a very real way, these leaders make the transition from trying to build ideal Sunday services to building amazing organizations that will host services for years to come.** This transition can be hard for leaders because they get into ministry to minister to people directly and hence, can find the skills of organization building to be a stretch. This shift is at the very core of what allows a church to scale up and go. If the leadership can’t make this transition, the church will ultimately plateau and spiral into decline.



If you look at the marketplace, you can see all kinds of examples of people who were “obsessed” with building great products or services. However, over time, they shifted to building great organizations with a lasting legacy. Arguably, the story of Steve Jobs is one wherein his first iteration of leading Apple was all about building the perfect computer. But his second stint as the CEO was all about building an amazing organization. Ultimately, that organization went on to scale new heights than he was able to achieve in his own lifetime. We’re seeing the same thing happening with Amazon as well. Earlier on, Jeff Bezos was all about being customer driven, but he has most definitely shifted to building a world-class customer-driven company. **The task of leading an organization that attempts to scale and grow is about gearing up for the task of building an amazing organization rather than myopically focusing on the actual deliverables we’re delivering.** How are you working “on” the church rather than just “in” it?

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