

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



9 Tips

FOR "LEADING UP" AT YOUR CHURCH

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“Hold yourself responsible for a higher standard than anybody expects of you. Never excuse yourself.”

Henry Ward Beecher



All of us work for somebody. Even if we sit in the senior pastor role at our church, we most likely report to a board. Often, we think more about how we lead the people "under" us rather than "leading up." I've spent most of my ministry career as a part of the leadership team in growing churches. I've made some boneheaded moves in that seat, which have taught me what not to do in leading my leaders. I've also honed practices over time that have allowed me to influence the people "above" me. Here are some of those lessons to apply as you lead your leaders:

- **Ask Insightful Questions** // In your efforts to be useful to your church, there can be a temptation to be the "answerer"... resist this temptation. People who ask penetrating questions that steer the conversation are valuable to any organization. Practice active listening and then construct your questions to help guide the conversation to new insights. Often, leaders are stuck with binary answers to questions ... help your supervisors to see "third options." Lead with questions rather than smart answers.

- **Enable Learning** // By definition, you have a more detailed understanding of what's happening in your area than the people who are leading you have. You are closer to the action because of your seat on the bus. Use this position to help your supervisor learn about the critical factors impacting your ministry. Suggest resources like books, podcasts or conferences to help keep them up to speed on the latest developments in your ministry. This is particularly true when

you are led by a volunteer board: you need to take an active role in helping them understand the dynamics of leading a church because their day-to-day reality is likely very different.

- **Public Loyalty Breeds Private Influence** // Be unwavering in your support for your supervisor(s) in public. Reference their leadership in your life and ministry. This loyalty will increase your influence down the road because it builds trust with them. Take time out to thank your leaders in front of your community. Give them credit for good stuff that is happening in the organization.

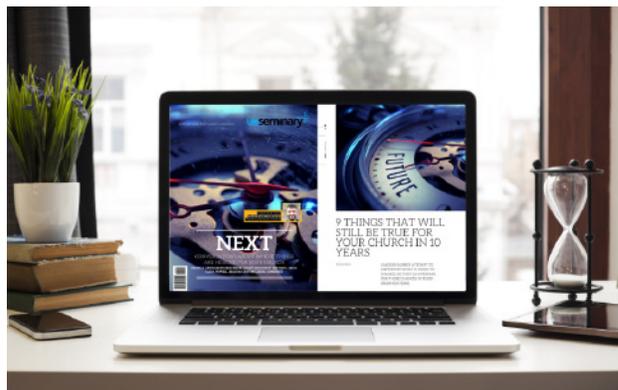
- **Present Solutions Instead of Problems** // Leaders see lots of things they'd like to fix in your church. They know there are a lot of areas that need improvement. Don't be a person who just points out problems without any solutions. If you do need to make your leadership aware of an issue, make sure you also have a potential solution or two.

• **Identify Their Mission Priorities** // What is it that your leadership wants to see happen at your church? Do you have a clear sense of how they want to see the mission unfold? Align your work and effort to what's important to your leadership. If you don't understand what's important ... ask! Take time to get clarity on the desired future and then work toward delivering it. (Side note: Even if some of the desired future isn't directly in your area of responsibility, you should aid the effort to see it come true. Your leaders won't stop you from doing that!)

• **Be Prepared** // Leaders self-perceive that they are very busy and so you need to leverage your time with them effectively. Make sure you're organized every time you meet with them. Write out what you want to discuss in a one-page document and have the data you need to support the conversation. Don't waste your leader's time. If you aren't prepared for the conversation, then reschedule. The Boy Scouts were right – Be Prepared!

• **Do Stuff Other People Won't** // There are tasks in your church that other members of the team won't do ... do those things. Look for projects that other people seem to shy away from and then lean in on them. Be a problem solver.

• **Invest in Your Leadership Development** // One of the best things you can do to gain more influence with your leaders is to develop your own leadership. Invest in training that helps you grow as a leader and as a person. Read more. Listen to podcasts. Take an online course or two. Your supervisor(s) will notice this investment and it will increase your scope.



• **Be Ready to Change** // Don't fall into the trap of thinking that you have it all figured out. Let your leader lead! Be ready for them to provide some great insights and direction to make your idea better. Posture your interaction with them in a way that encourages them to provide feedback, as opposed to a "fully baked approach" that doesn't allow them to give input. There is a reason they are leading you – let them lead and shape what you're looking to do!

More Resources to Help You Lead Your Leaders

- [Josh Whitehead on Leading from the Second Chair](#)
- [4 Leadership Personalities Needed for Your Church Team](#)
- [Bruxy Cavey on the Misunderstood Leadership Traits of Jesus](#)
- [6 Leadership Lessons I Learned from Wearing a Chicken Suit at Church](#)

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