

Transitioning Elders

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 3

Introduction

The problem of transitioning leadership or church eldership is a huge global problem. Passing on the baton, or developing of new leaders is not happening in the churches.

A man from a seminary in Long Island approached Alex with his story. He had graduated from a seminary and returned to Long Island where he had grown up. He wanted to be a pastor in a church in Long Island. He got back to Long Island, and a church without a pastor approached him and asked, "Would you fill our pulpit for six months?" He stayed for six months after which another church called him and said, "Look, we don't have a pastor; can you come fill in for a few months?" He went, and he stayed there for a year. He then said to me, "For the last fourteen years that has been my job. I'm a fill in pastor. I stay six months to a year, and no longer. Here is what I've learned in fourteen years: no one trains people; no one is planning for the next generation. When one pastor leaves, the whole process starts all over again, and, in the meantime, no one has been developed. Men in their forties and fifties in those churches can't even open the Bible and instruct the congregation. The whole system is a failure. It's a graduating class that never graduates."

He continued, "In many churches people stay from infancy throughout their lifetime memberships, and the system is geared that way. They will say, 'Our pastor is leaving or retiring. Well, we will just hire another pastor. We'll just find someone from seminary.' That's not biblical. That pastor should not have left until he had trained and developed people for leadership. He should have prepared them to develop on their own." He added, "Church after church is just like this. They have no strategy. They have no desire to develop their men so that they could open the Word and lead the church. Every new pastor develops his own new ideas and philosophy."

The best and ideal way to transition leadership is to continually consider the future and to avoid sudden shifts or dramatic changes.

Let's now look at this pattern in the New Testament.

I. Jesus Christ Prepared the Next Generation of Leaders.

*"And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve . . . so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach."
(Mark 3:13-14 ESV)*

A. Our Lord is a master developer of the next generation.

Jesus didn't wait till he was about to die to find replacements. For three years he disciplined men to take carry on the work. After his death, they were trained and ready to go forward.

“The great Founder of the faith desires not only to have disciples, but to have about Him men whom He might train to make disciples of others. Both from His words and from His actions we can see that He attached supreme importance to that part of His work, which consisted in training the twelve. In the intercessory prayer, e.g., John 17, He speaks of the training He had given these men as if it had been the principal part of His own earthly ministry. And such, in one sense, it really was. The careful, painstaking education of the disciples secured that the Teacher’s influence on the world should be permanent.” – A. B. Bruce, The Training of the Twelve, p. 13

B. The Lord said, “I will develop you to catch people.”

“And He said to them, Follow me, and I will make (this is a promise) you fishers of men.” (Matt. 4:19)

“Developing people was a principle part of the Lord’s ministry.” – A. B. Bruce

The same should be true of all church leaders.

C. Illustrations

1. Story of the U.S. relay team – Though they were the best team and most likely, to win were disqualified because they dropped the baton at the third exchange.
2. In Luke 6, we read that Jesus spent the whole night praying before he picked the disciples. That’s how important it was to Jesus. That is an example for the present leaders to follow.

II. Paul Prepared the Next Generation of Leaders.

“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” (Acts 20:26–27)

A. Charge to all elders

In his farewell message to the Ephesian elders, Paul could honestly say, *“I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God”* (Acts 20:27). He had prepared them by teaching them the “whole counsel of God.” He could leave with a clear conscience. He had spent at least 2 years with them warning them and teaching them. Now, he had to leave and they had to carry on the work.

B. Vision for all elders

Paul has been with them for three years teaching them the word of God. This must be the vision for all church elders. He also had his Timothy’s and Titus’! He loved these men. He taught them and they learned by watching and listening to him many times over.

C. Elders must think of the future.

So he could tell these men, “What you have heard from me, you should now pass on to others.” He trusted them with difficult jobs. He was a trainer of men who was always thinking of the future.

III. Timothy Prepared the Next Generation of Leaders.

“What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2)

This is a key moment Paul is at the end of his life and Timothy is in Ephesus and Paul is asking him to pass on what he has learned. This is true apostolic succession.

There are two marks of these men who are to be trained.

A. Their character – faithful

Faithful means trustworthy, reliable. These men are the opposite of the false teachers in Ephesus and those who have fallen away. The choice of appropriate people is essential in this task. The right men are the key.

B. Their ability to teach

What he says next is “the kind who will also be competent to teach others.” The word “able” (Greek: *hikannos*) means competent, capable, qualified, able.

1. The idea is of fitness or capability.

- a) Not all believers are suitably gifted. This doesn’t mean an orator, but one able and interested in teaching other people the truths of Christ.
- b) This man can understand ideas and difficult concepts. He can read and study.
- c) This man can communicate to others. He has the ability to speak logically and understandably. He creates interest in his hearers.
- d) He sees fruit from his ministry. People learn from him and come back.
- e) He wants to teach others and is ready to do it.

“An elder must ... hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”
(Titus 1:9)

- f) This is directed to a specific group of people.

2. The key verb in this passage is “entrust.”

- a) This verb is used for “committing someone/something into the care of another,” literally, “give over” also “pass on to others for safekeeping and transmission.”
- b) The word “entrust” (Greek: *paratithêmi*) is an imperative verb—an explicit apostolic directive. NIV, ESV, and NASB use “entrust;” KJV and NKJV use “commit.”
- c) Paul envisions a process, a task. Someone—a person—is to do this. Paul doesn’t say the Holy Spirit will do this. People are to do this with his help.

- d) Brothers, it is not left to our choosing whether or not we will train our future leaders; it is a divine must.

"Entrusting the apostolic deposit to others is our God given task and joy."

– Kent Hughes

- e) Timothy was to be deliberate and active in this specific area of teaching. This is part of the spiritual reproduction.

C. Continuing process

1. Now, in 2 Timothy 2:2, we see three stages in the training process:
 - a) Paul to Timothy,
 - b) Timothy to faithful men who can teach,
 - c) Faithful men who can teach to other faithful men who can teach.
2. This is an ongoing process and its first application is to elders.

D. Be mentors

1. This is a wonderful and succinct description of elders that summarizes the qualifications listed in both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.
2. Paul teaches the men to be mentors to invest in the lives of men like this, not troubled people. Paul is speaking of a select group of men—leaders—who are to receive special attention and teaching and responsibility.
3. Notice the future tense “who will be able.” In the future, these men will use what has been passed on to them. This is spiritual reproduction. This is preparing for the future. Men are being prepared for leadership. This is true apostolic succession so it must go on.

IV. Elders Must Prepare the Next Generation of Leaders.

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip [or prepare] the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” (Eph. 4:11–12)

A. Shepherd the church

Peter says, “Shepherd the church,” and part of shepherding is to raise leaders who will be shepherds for the future. We should not be one-generation shepherds. “Who’s going to care for the flock of God after I am gone?”

B. Be an overseer - It is also part of the job description as being “an overseer.”

C. Shepherds are to be church elders.

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” (1 Tim. 5:17-18)

1. One aspect of their labor will be “*entrusting the gospel to faithful men*” (2 Tim. 2:2).
2. This takes time and effort and skill. Equipping and preparing others must be done.
3. And only elders can really develop and open doors for future elders.

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V. A Vision and Commitment to Training Future Elders

A. Understand the plan.

1. Just like families develop their young people, the pastoral oversight of God's flock is to prepare for the future and the ongoing leadership of the flock. Be fruitful and multiply.
2. Illustration:
 - a) There was an article some time ago in U.S. News and World Report. The article had some significant things to say about the family owned businesses in America.
 - b) Economists estimate that such businesses account for nearly 50% of the nation's gross national product. The authors listed all the advantages of family owned businesses and why they are so successful.
 - c) Toward the end they made an astonishing observation; only a third of such businesses survive into the second generation. They don't train their children to take over the family business.
 - d) There were two failures that account for this disturbing trend:
 - 1) They lack confidence in their young people, and
 - 2) They are too busy to train them!
 - e) Think of it! They didn't have time to train them and they didn't trust them.
3. We are in the business of training next generation.
4. We've got to make time for developing them, and we've got to trust them; we've got no other choice. And if we train them properly, they will carry on well.

B. "Be the man."

*"Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress."
(1 Tim. 4:15 ESV)*

1. Be both able and willing to develop others.
2. Nothing happens if there is no one to make things happen. A change agent is needed.
3. "Leadership is influence."
 - a) You can't influence others if your faith is not contagious and if you are not growing. You can't raise the interest in others if you're not interested.
 - b) Paul could say: *"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."* (1 Cor. 11:1)
4. There is nothing more exciting for a church than to see their leaders grow and to take their church forward in the Spirit of the Lord.

5. In an article “Why So Many Christians Leaders Do Not End Their Life Well,” Paul Stanley and Robert Clinton assert that one of the primary reasons many Christian leaders and teachers do not finish their lives effectively for Christ is because at some point in life they stop growing in their knowledge and love for Christ:

We have observed that most people cease learning by the age of forty. By that we mean they no longer actively pursue knowledge, understanding, and experience that will enhance their capacity to grow and contribute to others. Most simply rest on what they already know. But those who finish well maintain a positive learning attitude all their lives. Many people, particularly leaders, plateau. They become satisfied with where they are and with what they know. This often occurs after they attain enough to be comfortable or can maintain a relatively secure and predictable future. But this contradicts the biblical principle of stewardship. –Stanley and Robert Clinton, Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life, p. 222

6. The leader must keep on growing.

“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward [man] is renewed day by day.” (2 Cor. 4:16)

7. Paul is probably around sixty but he says he is still a growing man, growing into Christ likeness. Elders must keep their gas tank full; they must sharpen the saw, if not, no one will follow.

8. In light of this natural tendency, Paul’s charge to Timothy bears repeating:

“Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Tim. 4:15–16)

VI. A Strategy and Plan for Training Future Elders

You may have the best intentions for developing future elders, but without a plan you will get nowhere. It is like prayer. You know prayer is essential to the Christian life, but if you don’t plan to pray you probably won’t pray.

A. Develop an eye for people and potential.

1. Good shepherds have an eye for sheep. They can spot potential. Indeed, they have a responsibility to identify their sheep.
2. If you love the church, open your eyes to see whom God has placed in your congregation to lead and teach for the future. Be alert and be looking all the time.
3. Illustration: There is this story of a young man that appeared in the local newspaper who was a sleep walker. He would get out in his pajamas and knock on doors around three in the morning. When people saw him, he would look at them but not see them and walk right past them. Similarly, we can be spiritual sleepwalkers in church.
4. Elders are to keep an eye out and not be sleepwalkers.

5. This is applicable not just for identifying potential within the church but also wherever we are to be aware of the people. Jesus said he would make us "fishers of men" and for that we need to keep our eyes open.
6. Whenever you are with people train yourself to look at them, show interest, get their name, draw them into a conversation.

B. Cast a vision for the individual.

1. It is important that elders are able to inspire a vision for those in the church, both men and women.
2. Illustration: When Alex Strauch first moved to Denver, Colorado in 1968, he went to a local church and decided to put all his energy and time into that assembly. After three months he left because he could see that there was no possible way, within the next fifty years, that any young person would have any kind of significant ministry in that church. There was a group of old men in charge, and no one was going to be invited to be a trainee or leader until they all were laid flat and were put deep into the grave. After Strauch left that church, he went to Littleton Bible Chapel where he served as an elder for over 40 years. After about a month at Littleton Chapel, one of the elders took Strauch out to lunch and said, "Alex, there's a place here for you. We want you to stay here."

C. Build relationships with potential elders.

1. Illustration: Story of how Alex Strauch disciplined David Anderson
2. Frankly, much of developing people is simply having an interest in people. But interest is not enough; you must also be available.
 - a) Have lunch or dinner together.
 - b) Use the time to get to know each other or talk theology.
 - c) Enjoy fun activities and fellowship together.
 - d) Go fishing, skiing, boating, hiking, golfing, racquetball, basket weaving, whatever!
3. Interest and availability are two key concepts for disciplers.
4. One of Jesus' ways of training men was spending time with them.
5. Mark 3:14 says, "And he appointed twelve . . . that they might be with him."
6. A large part of their training was watching and observing him. Deep memories and impressions are made by living examples!
7. Example is powerful and lasting.

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VII. A Strategy and Plan for Training Future Elders (cont.)

D. Provide education and resources for potential elders.

1. Conferences: They are a good way to train men.
2. To cite just a few, conferences are held annually by John Piper (Minnesota), John MacArthur (California), R. C. Sproul (Orlando), Chuck Swindoll (Mt. Hermon, California).
3. In addition there are many others including the “Iron Sharpens Iron” conference sponsored by Emmaus Bible College (Iowa) every May.

E. Bibles and books

1. They need a good Bible and good tools for Bible study.
 - a) *Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 3.20-4.25: Atonement and Justification*, by David Martin Llyod-Jones
 - b) *The Cross of Christ*, by John Stott
 - c) *Justification*, by R.C. Sproul
2. Just like home is the foundation of education so must the local church be.

“... The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” (1 Tim. 3:15b NKJV)
3. And that truth is the gospel and it must be taught. We are all in the education business. We educate people in the gospel—we are a gospel school.

F. Open doors for potential elders.

1. Elders’ meetings – “elder exposure”
 - a) Invite potential leaders to observe elders’ meetings and go on visits with you.
 - b) It is important that they learn to pray with you and capture your heart for the lost, the sick, and the needy.

2. Opportunities for ministry

If you see a young person with some gift, give guidance to direct that person into a weekly Sunday school class to teach or give the person a junior or senior high class to lead.

Conclusion

An eldership must have a personal vision for growth. This can be done by:

- Reading the Bible and praying consistently.
 - Listening to sermons and Bible expositions through downloads, MP3 etc.
 - Short-term missions trips
 - Formal schooling: If it is possible, allow for men to have a year or more of formal schooling. Use the resources of other churches.
 - Seizing your commute: get a seminary-level education during the commute.
 - Downloading sermons, podcasts etc. and listen to as many sermons as possible. Gospel Coalition, Together for the Gospel, Grace to you, Desiring God are excellent sites to visit.
 - We are to be masters of the Word and people of prayer.
- “... Devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:4 ESV)
- As an individual always be thinking, “How can I be progressing in my Christian life, not resting in the past success?”

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” (2 Tim. 2:2 KJV)