

CREATING A CULTURE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

by Gary Preston, Lead Pastor
Frontline Community Church
Ramstein, Germany

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. (2 Tim. 2:2)

Developing leaders was one of the passions of the Apostle Paul. In addition to being a renowned church planter, competent pastor, and gifted evangelist, Paul loved to develop and deploy leaders for the burgeoning Christian church of the first century.

When writing to one of the young leaders he was developing, Paul told Timothy to be on the watch for other people he could develop as leaders just as Paul was doing with him. It seems that the development of leaders was never far from the apostle's mind, and he wanted it to be imbedded in the minds of other leaders as well.

I wish that developing leaders came as naturally to me as it seemingly did to Paul. I can get so engulfed in the day-to-day activities of an active church and constant preparation to preach the next Sunday that leadership development can quickly move to a back burner.

With the demands and distractions of church life and ministry, most pastors and churches I know share my challenge of trying to be intentional about developing leaders. The difference is that harvesting leaders is simply done by looking around and identifying the people in the church who are already leaders and then putting them into leadership roles. The liability in that approach is that most churches will quickly run out of seasoned leaders who are ready to be harvested.

Developing leaders, on the other hand, provides a continual pipeline of leadership for the church to draw upon. Unlike harvesting leaders, there is no limit to the number of people in a church who can be developed into leaders.

So, I have determined that one of the marks of my ministry at Frontline Community Church is to establish a culture in the church that fosters developing the next generation of leaders for the church and for the broader work of God's Kingdom throughout the world. Our staff and elders work hard at this, and I have tried to glean everything I can from how the Apostle Paul did it throughout his ministry in order to help us create that culture.

As a starter, I've outlined for our staff, elders, and leaders **7 STEPS** we must consistently take to establish a church culture that develops leaders. These steps aren't an exhaustive list, but we have found them to be a helpful guide for the task.

1. Vision

The vision of the church must be so large and compelling that everyone realizes that additional leadership is essential to accomplishing the vision. In fact, we have made developing leaders an integral part of our church's vision so that it doesn't get lost in the weekly hustle of church life. Now, one of my responsibilities as a pastor is to model leadership development and keep the vision for it before our staff and leaders.

2. Identify

The next generation of leaders is all around us. They are people from every walk of life, every age group, every ethnic background, every gender. So, the next step is always to be praying and watching for people who show signs of leadership. This passion for identifying new leaders must flow from the lead pastor through every ministry leader (paid and unpaid) and board member so that it becomes a 24/7 focus of every leader in the church.

Our worship director told me last week that she finally has her leadership team in place and they are functioning like a cohesive unit. Then her next sentence was, "So now I can focus on identifying the next wave of leaders we'll need to replace them!" I could relate to her challenge! And I was also encouraged by her understanding that developing leaders never stops.

So, what are the "signs" we look for in potential leaders? Chapters could be written on that subject, so I'll only add a thought I gleaned from a friend in The Navigators ministry many years ago. He referred to these potential leaders as F.A.T. They are Faithful, Available, and Teachable. My friend always looked for those characteristics in a person or sought to develop them because they mark a person as a potential leader.

3. Invite

I tell our staff, "When you find a F.A.T. person, make it a point get to know him or her." Invest some time in their lives so you can validate your inclination that they are Faithful, Available, and Teachable or so you can help create those characteristics. Once that is validated, invite them to join you in the process of becoming a spiritual leader.

Even when He ministered to the crowds to the point of exhaustion, Jesus constantly had His eye on developing leaders who would carry on the ministry after He was gone. The Apostle Paul likewise was never without an apprentice leader he was mentoring and developing.

I'm always amazed at how many potential leaders in our church are just sitting there, not engaged in any leadership responsibility, until someone invites them to step forward into a leadership role. I believe we too often underestimate the power of an invitation to someone to join us in leadership.

I admit that when I hear someone say that their ministry has a shortage of leaders, my response isn't very sympathetic. Instead I say something to the effect, "Well then, it's time to get back to the task of developing the leaders you need!"

Recently I've noticed that I don't hear that lament nearly as much as I used to. I believe it is because our staff is getting more adept at developing new leaders rather than that they just don't want to hear my same response again!

4. Define

Once you identify and invite a potential leader, you must know what kind of leader you want to develop. An effective leadership development culture in the church requires that everyone knows what a competent leader looks like. This profile will include some common qualifications in terms of a leader's character, competency, and values.

Then, beyond those common traits of leadership, there should be a corresponding description of what competent leadership will look like for specific areas of ministry. For example, what specific characteristics are needed in a small group leader or servant ministry leader or staff member or elder?

Something that has helped us in this regard is that we have developed a written description for every leadership position in our church. This has made us think through exactly the kind of person we are looking for and the skills and character traits we want to develop in those leaders.

5. Instruct

I believe that leadership can be taught. I also understand that not everyone agrees with me on that. Some believe that you either are a leader or you are not. You either have the skill or you don't.

I believe all F.A.T. people can be developed into effective leaders. So, the next step we take in developing leaders is to establish a strategy for how to train and instruct new leaders. One of the most effective means for instructing and training new leaders that I've experienced is through a leadership Triad group. Leadership Triads consist of three individuals who share life and leadership development together. Normally a triad will consist of one person who is farther down the leadership road than the others, who will be the primary guide or facilitator of the group, though not the resident expert. A second triad member will often be someone who is engaged in the process of developing as a leader. And the third member can be the rookie who has exhibited the signs of a leader.

In addition to a Triad, a more formal leadership core group can be helpful. This provides an opportunity for prescribed learning and coaching. It also offers a chance to learn from others in a small group setting. The way we do this is to design all our leadership meetings with some coaching component that helps our current leaders and potential leaders learn more about leadership. We never gather a leadership team together just to discuss business or coordinate schedules or plan an event. We always include a training element.

Leadership training is ongoing and not just a class that is completed. It's important to discuss leadership competencies and character continually, in formal, informal, and on-the-job settings.

6. Deploy

Coupled with the instruction received in a leadership Triad or core group, deploying new leaders into practical opportunities to exercise leadership is essential. These leadership opportunities become the on-the-job training aspect of leadership development. What a new leader is learning in the "classroom" of a Triad or core group gets to be practiced in real life.

Of course, the leadership opportunities need to be tailored to the leadership level of the developing leader. Early on, the leadership opportunity will be engaged alongside a more skilled leader so there can be guidance and direction provided. Eventually, the developing leader will be given opportunities that are more independent as their leadership skills grow. One church (Community Christian Church of Naperville, Illinois (USA)) outlines this in a five-step process you may find helpful:

- I do, you watch, we talk
- I do, you help, we talk
- You do, I help, we talk
- You do, I watch, we talk
- You do and invite someone else to watch and repeat the process

7. Mentor

A final step in leadership development is ongoing mentoring and coaching. Churches that are serious about developing leaders don't drop leaders once they are deployed in a leadership position. These intentional churches reject the Daniel in the Lions' Den approach: throw them into a leadership position (the lions' den) and then check back in a few months to see if they are still alive!

Leadership development churches are committed to helping new leaders achieve success through on-going coaching and mentoring. While coaching is more skill-oriented, mentoring adds the broader element of whole-person development, including the spiritual life. Good mentoring provides consistent and honest feedback and offers coaching on how to refine and develop specific leadership skills. Effective mentors believe that failure isn't fatal, so they are willing to accept poor performances as opportunities for learning and growth.

Good mentors are not afraid to engage other skilled leadership coaches who can also impart good training to developing leaders. It also calls upon young leaders to evidence a teachable spirit as they are open to and solicitous of on-going coaching.

Mentoring and coaching also show new leaders that their primary responsibility is not to execute a program or conduct a ministry by themselves. True leaders develop other leaders who can engage together in doing the ministry.

Certainly there are other steps and techniques that foster leadership development. These seven are offered as a manageable place to start. Incorporating these seven leadership development steps will require intentionality, perseverance, focus, and prayer. The payoff will be an endless pipeline of new leaders who are raised up from within an inexhaustible culture of leadership development.