**Healthy Leadership Transitions**

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**ILLUS: Recently spoke with a pastor about transition. I never had training about how to go about transition in healthy way.**

**\*\*** I have been at New Life for 37 years now. Many others a long time. Didn’t give a lot of thought to transitions……but

\*\*The average time that pastors stay at a protestant church in America is down to **4 years**. The average youth pastor’s tenure is **18 months.**

The statistics for pastoral leadership transition are fairly grim. It has been reported that as much **80%** of pastoral transitions do not go well. Another stat indicated that only **33% go well.**

Fifteen hundred pastors leave the ministry each month due to moral failure, spiritual burnout, or contention in their churches.

**UNHEALTHY PASTORAL LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS EFFECTS:**

1. Some churches just **Stop**. They cease to exist.
2. Other churches **Split**. Power struggles occur. The congregation feels divided loyalty. Insecurity during transition.
3. Other churches **Stall**. They lose momentum and the mission gets put on hold for internal focus.

**4 Times as many people think about changing churches during transition.**

**Truth About Transitions:**

* Sometimes transitions are necessary and best for the ministry and the leader in transition.
* Transitions can be significant season for needed change and resetting.
* Transitions reset churches for future mission.
* A Pastor/shepherd’s responsibility is to transition in a healthy way.

**What not to do during Transition:**

* + Don’t make a decision and than loop the pastoral team into the conversation. (not including your team in the process).
  + Don’t talk to your elders and ministry leaders and tell them not to tell your BTC or New Life Pastoral team. (it pits elders against pastoral leaders)
  + Don’t tell other pastor friends in the New Life team and ask them not to say anything to Pastoral leaders. (it puts other leaders in a difficult place when it comes out)
  + Don’t start applying for jobs before you tell your pastoral leaders that you are doing so. (invite them into the conversation)
  + Don’t express discontentment or grievances about New Life Leadership to the location elder team when you are frustrated. (its poisons the water for the future)
  + Don’t hand in a two week or month resignation letter when you can work on a longer transition ramp. Unfair to the church.
  + Don’t leave and recruit people to another church in the same community. Ethically wrong to do so.

**What to do during Transition:**

* + Do include your Pastoral team leaders in praying through a possible transition.
  + Do tell your Pastoral team before you tell the church elders so they can communicate with you.
  + Do watch out for the best of the congregation and the future of the ministry.
  + Do sit down with HR and BTC coach to talk about timelines for a healthy transition.
  + Do bless the ministry you are leaving and affirm what you can.

**Personal Transition Experience:**

**My Personal Experience:**

* + Church had reached 200 people ready to transition. I submitted it to the elders and outside counsel. Contrary to what I wanted they asked me to stay and so I did.

**Moody Transition**

* + I spoke with trusted people as I was discerning and seeking clarity. My wife, Peter Stott, Mike Pocock…
  + Decided to pray about it. (Others need to discern not just a moment of stress, discontentment or being stuck)
  + I invited BTC pastoral leaders to pray with Dee and I as I sought to discern the process.
  + ***The more you invite leaders into the process the healthier the transition.***
  + I submitted my decision to the Pastoral Leadership Team- not move forward without the blessing.
  + When transition became clear. I walked along side team to secure a healthy transition.
  + Ask: How can I create least disruption and transition in a healthy way.

**New Life’s Commitment to Transition Healthy:**

* + Conversations about seasons, possible transitions, wrestling with calling will be met with grace and pastoral care.
  + Our default mode is to seek to bless those that are transitioning as much as possible walk alongside them.
  + The earlier leadership is looped into the conversation of transition the more the leadership feels a part of and can plan for a healthy transition.
  + New Life Leadership will seek to build a healthy ramp of transition as long as it is not being hi-jacked by critical or divisive spirit.

**HOW TO HANDLE AN ELDER/LEADER THAT LEAVES CRITICAL:**

**What to do with an Elder/Leader that leaves Critical?**

* + Talk through the issues so that there is clarity on the problem.
  + Look for symptoms of disengagement in advance.

**Book: Saving Your Church from Itself- Chris Sonksen**

Signs of Leadership Drift:

* Drifting towards artificial harmony
* Drifting towards isolation
* Drifting towards a critical spirit
* Drifting towards division
* Drifting towards a gradual shutdown
  + Have them write down the issues that they are concerned about.
  + Involved other leaders on your team for perspective and or when it becomes personal.
  + Invite the BTC coach or other pastors when necessary, into the conversation.
  + Seek to bless the leader out as much as possible.
  + Clarify to the leader you desire to bless but will address critical comments when necessary.
  + Address criticism quickly, humbly and with as much grace as possible.

**When do you tell people not to associate or talk with a disgruntled person?**

* + Warn a critical person privately. If they continue do so with other elders.
* These **six things the Lord hates,  
  Yes, seven are an abomination to Him**:  
  A proud look,  
  A lying tongue,  
  Hands that shed innocent blood,  
  A heart that devises wicked plans,  
  Feet that are swift in running to evil,  
  A false witness who speaks lies,  
  And **one who sows discord among brethren.**
* ***Proverbs 6:16-19***
  + People value your friendship and get caught in a web of criticism.
  + Educate people to draw boundaries with critical people.

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. **Romans 16:17 (ESV)**

* + Remind people that listening to gossip without addressing is to participate in gossip. (When its about spiritual leadership it is not just gossip it is divisive)

As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, **Titus 3:10 ESV**

* + There is a damaging trust issue that erodes trust if not dealt with.
* A divisive person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned. ***Titus 3:11***
* The Greek word for “warped” is [ekstrephō](https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1612/kjv/tr/0-1/" \t "_blank) and this is the only place it occurs in Scripture. It means, *“To turn or twist.”*
* Divisive people are *“twisted.”* You can’t help them because they’re unreasonable. They can’t be counseled, because it’s like dealing with fools.

**How do you handle people that leave and begin speaking negatively about your leadership or the church?**

* + Seek to address the issues with the disgruntled or critical person. If the person in criticism and agitation.
  + Gather those that are most effected by the relationships and gossip to address what is being said and how to handle it.
  + Put the responsibility on your leadership team to inform you if someone they are talking to is speaking ill of leaders and church.
  + Ask leaders to inform you if they are meeting with someone that is disgruntled so that it does not appear to be betrayal.

**In the end GRACE AND TRUTH are important components to healthy and smooth transitions.**