

11 for 11: Ideas That Work

Team Collaboration: Broadening the Church Leadership Platform

by Sherry Surratt and Wayne Smith

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Seacoast Church in Charleston, SC (www.seacoast.org) is experiencing an emerging trend in North American church leadership: the structure is changing from a single leader calling all the shots to flattened-hierarchy leadership teams that share crucial strategic and directional responsibilities.

Similar to many new churches, Seacoast was started by a single senior pastor (Greg Surratt) who grew the ministry, and soon found that he needed more leadership muscle to handle the growth. Enter brother Geoff Surratt (*full disclosure: one of this article's authors is happily married to Geoff*), who eventually moved into the role of executive pastor.

Geoff's move illustrates the first iteration of today's leadership shift in growing churches: the addition of an executive pastor or other key implementer. This person typically manages day-to-day operations such as staff relations, finances, facilities and leadership development.

The addition of a second major player is usually followed by additional steps to broaden the leadership platform even more. The net result is a leadership team with multiple strategic and directional leaders who not only use their gifts, abilities and varied backgrounds to oversee



important facets of decision making and execution; they also share the load for visioning, strategic direction and communication.

Seacoast has moved that direction with a three-pronged executive team. For Seacoast, the three prongs are Executive Administrator, Pastor of Ministries and Director of Operations. Many other churches are developing their own models, each of which looks far less like a one-person base that makes all key decisions and announces God's direction, and more like collaborative leadership groups with blended visions and shared viewpoints.

Metrics

- Church planting increasingly happens by teams rather than by solo leaders.

Church planting organizations, such as the Acts 29 network (www.acts29network.org), the Association of Related Churches (www.arcchurches.com) and Saddleback's new church planting network (www.saddleback.com), acknowledge that today's church planter can't and shouldn't go it alone. That's why those church-starting groups no longer send a single pastoral family to start a new congregation.

It's a support team—usually 3 or 4 leaders and their families to oversee operations, worship, small groups, etc. They are riding the wisdom of Scripture that a chord with many strands is not easily broken (Eccles. 4:12). Nobody should do it alone; it's too difficult.

- **An increasing number of key implementers and team leaders are coming from business vs. ministry backgrounds.**

Church leaders are looking for help from a variety of fields. While church life is highly spiritual in nature, seminary training and ordination don't address every leadership need in burgeoning ministries. Followers of Christ with training and experience from the business world also bring value to the equation. As a result, an increasing number of key implementers and team leaders in churches are coming from people with business backgrounds, including the educational world.

Trends

- **Less formal ministry training; more Ala carte, on-the-job development.**

As churches employ strategic leaders who come out of varied backgrounds, those staff members are relying less on formal seminary and Bible school training and more on as-they-need-it development for the tasks at hand.

Fellowship Bible Church in Dallas, TX (www.fellowshipdallas.org) has former lawyer, Tommy Shelton, as its executive pastor as well as educator and technology leader, Reinhard Ziegler, as its chief navigator. Neither one received formal ministry training, but each has learned on the go from places like executive pastor conferences, where they surround themselves with more experienced leaders. When Geoff Surratt became pastor of ministries with responsibility over multisite development, he read every multisite report he could find

and studied leading multisite churches around the country. When his position changed from just launching campuses to a more strategic directional and visionary role, he started a whole new library and met with leadership mentors around the country.

Jenni Catron, executive director at Cross Point Church in Nashville, TN (www.crosspoint.tv) came out of the music industry with no formal ministry training, but aligns herself with mentors and business people who shore up weaknesses and give strategic input. Mary Carroll, executive pastor of Hosanna Lutheran in Lakeville, MN (www.hosannalc.org), came from a legal background to develop her ministry knowledge on the job. Numerous other executive pastors and key implementers around the country have followed similar paths.

- **More fluid roles, more organic titles.**

The days are fading fast of writing a job description for a church staff position, hiring the ideal ministry-trained candidate for the position, and locking that individual into the duties and responsibilities that experience little change over the long haul.

Church leaders are seeing the scope and direction of their duties—along

with their titles—shift with the tides of their congregation's growth and development. One prominent U.S. lead pastor recently announced that several staff members would be changing titles and roles, in an intentional effort to jump-start stagnant ministries and realign staff according to their skill sets. Another church is moving a staff member with a background in communications leadership from a long-held staff position to one that oversees all of the church's communications. The message from churches to staff members around the country: stay nimble and adaptable, and don't get too comfortable. Things are changing rapidly.

- **More skills-based placement on leadership teams.**

Seacoast's Bill Hahn has a banking background, which suits him for the church's role of People Resource Director over human resources and finances. Jack Hoey, the church's Chief Financial Officer, has run his own wholesale glass franchise. Others on the team have practical ministry experience, so they oversee the Campus Pastors and ministry areas. While some executive team placements do come through a traditional ministry track, value is also placed on the skills someone brings. Doing so elevates



A senior staff meeting at Fellowship Bible Church in Dallas where more team members are coming from business backgrounds.

committed people of God with marketplace training as invaluable to take a church to new heights of growth and development. As a result, churches are flattening layers of hierarchy in organizational structures and putting the best people in the best spots—regardless of where they got their training.

Questions

- How will team leadership affect the role and position of the senior pastor in the future?

Churches have operated for decades with a singular view of the senior pastor office and role: lead pastors get a vision from God, set direction, and call the shots with a staff that carries out the vision and direction. If a shared, team leadership model takes hold in the next 10-15 years, how will the senior pastor be perceived by congregants and staff members? And what roles and responsibilities will truly be shared, with others still reserved for the top spot? This is a question no one seems to have answered yet.

- How do we groom young leaders for future leadership in the church, and then how can their work ethic and learning approach be meshed with that of current leaders?

It's becoming increasingly clear that the rising generation of leaders learn, work and lead differently than their older, established counterparts. Leaders from the boomer generation—those born 1946-1964—tend to take a linear approach to learning and work: they sit through a training class or read a book, apply learning's to the task at hand, live to work (sometimes too hard and too long), and often do it with a strong Lone Ranger mentality.

By contrast, emerging-generation leaders apply as-needed learning that is usually web- and multi-media-based, work to live (and often see life



A group of women executive pastors praying during a recent meeting at Leadership Network.

as more important than work), and highly value collaborative insight, decision making, communication and implementation. Their view and definition of leadership is much less hierarchical, and is going to significantly impact future church leadership structures. The blending of those two styles—and passing of the leadership baton from one group to the next—will be fascinating to observe and track over the coming decades.

Predictions

- Team leadership and emerging leaders will impact all types of churches.

Traditional mainline churches, independent, non-denominational congregations, ethnic and others will all be changed—eventually—by this development of this broadened leadership platform. The younger the church, the more likely it is to become an early adaptor of a more fluid and collaborative model—and the less cultural pain that church will experience. Over time, more established and more traditional churches will be required to move toward collaborative leadership. A degree of pain will surface as deeply imbedded leadership models, structures, roles and personalities give

way to what's next.

The very nature of leadership—in the church and beyond—is changing. Top-down, hierarchical leadership is giving way to flatter structures where leadership is collaborative and shared. In the new world of leadership, more is often better, with more people being empowered to get a vision, set direction and strategy, make shared decisions and move forward together.

As this leadership platform widens, making room for more types of leaders, it also is changing the overall face and feel of church leadership. With increasing frequency, church leaders are no longer expected to get on the preset track and climb the ministry ladder—Bible college followed by seminary, low-level staff position and one day becoming a senior leader who calls the shots. More and more, church leaders in development are coming out of diverse backgrounds, with skills honed in the marketplace, and with significant ministry posts being carved out to exercise those skills. And, no longer are those key strategic and directional leaders made up of a predominant race, gender and age. Ethnic leaders, women and next-generation leaders are moving into significant church leadership roles and setting the direction for the future of the Kingdom.

About Leadership Network

Leadership Network's mission is to accelerate the impact of 100X leaders. These high-capacity leaders are like the hundredfold crop that comes from seed planted in good soil as Jesus described in Matthew 13:8. Leadership Network is a division of OneHundredX, a global ministry with initiatives around the world.

To learn more about Leadership Network go to www.leadnet.org

About 11 for 11

The idea behind 11 for 11 is to profile eleven specific ministry innovations (one per month) during 2011. The total series will also include Global Connections Churches, Rapid Growing Churches, Large Church Senior Pastors, Missional Renaissance, Next Generation Pastors, Externally Focused Churches, Multisite Churches, Leadership Development, Generous Churches, and Next Horizons.

Team Collaboration: Broadening the Church Leadership Platform is also available in these formats.



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About the Authors

Warren Bird, Ph.D., who is overseeing the 11 for 11 initiative, directs the research division of Leadership Network, bringing a background of pastoral ministry and seminary teaching. He has co-authored 23 books on various issues of church vitality and health. His bio is at www.leadnet.org/warrenbird



Sherry Surratt serves as the Director for the RadicalFuture Innovation Labs. She joined Leadership Network in 2008 with an extensive background in ministry, most recently serving as Central Support Pastor for Seacoast Church in Mt. Pleasant, SC. Prior to church ministry, Sherry was a teacher and administrator in the Houston Public School District. Her bio is at www.leadnet.org/sherrysurratt



Wayne Smith currently serves as the Leadership Community Director for Senior Pastor 2 and Senior Pastor Next Chapter. Wayne served as an Executive Pastor for several years, but the majority of his career was with Young Life. Wayne is a graduate of Texas Christian University (B.A.) and Dallas Theological Seminary (Th.M) and is also an ordained minister. His bio is at www.leadnet.org/waynesmith

Contact Us

Contact Wayne Smith at wayne.smith@leadnet.org if you are interested in joining a Life Stage Leadership Community. Life Stage 2 (Senior Pastors 2) is for senior pastors age 41-50, leading a church of 2500+ attendance and experience serving in the lead pastor role for at least 10+ years. Life Stage 3 (Next Chapter) is for senior pastors age 50+, leading a church of 3000+ attendance and experience serving in the lead pastor role for at least 20+ years.

Contact Sherry Surratt at sherry.surratt@leadnet.org if you are interested in joining a RadicalFuture Innovation Lab. The RadicalFuture Innovation Lab for Campus Pastor Development is designed to help multisite church teams form a strategic process for developing and identifying future and existing Campus Pastors.

Suggested Reading

Leading from the Second Chair by Mike Bonem (Jossey-Bass Leadership Network Series, 2005)
Reverse Mentoring by Earl Creps (Jossey-Bass Leadership Network Series, 2008)
Halftime by Bob Buford (Zondervan; Rev Upd edition, 2008)
Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman (Bantam; 10th Anniversary edition, 2006)
Relational Intelligence by Steve Saccone Creps (Jossey-Bass Leadership Network Series, 2009)
Leadership Is an Art by Max DePree (Crown Business, 2004)