

GROWTH POINTS

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Developing Credibility

In order to lead a church or other group of people, a pastor must have credibility. Briefly, one's credibility is a reflection of how much one is trusted by others as a leader. When a leader has credibility, others feel he or she has the ability and intention to deliver results.

This is an important concept, as it suggests (1) the need for sufficient credibility to execute a successful action, (2) the challenge of executing an action if it is opposed by someone with higher credibility, and (3) the need for considerable credibility in order to execute an action that runs counter to the prevailing culture.

So, how does one develop credibility with others in a church? Credibility is based on (1) one's individual accomplishments, (2) one's situation, and (3) one's relationships with others.

Individual Accomplishments

A leader gains credibility by contributing results that are valued by people in the church. What is honestly valued depends on the organizational culture.

For example, a pastor might be appointed to a church with a mandate to increase the evangelistic outreach. While this is an important aspect of a healthy church, it may not be what the people really value. If the church culture values care of members over evangelism of outsiders, successfully developing an outreach program may not increase the pastor's credibility. Credibility is only increased when results match the church's real values.

Individual Situation

Unfortunately, a pastor's credibility is not based solely on actual accomplishments, but other's perceptions. Each pastor carries a reputation that is based in part on past results, as well as on current actions within a church. People in a church, however, rely on their own understanding and perceptions as they assign credibility to leaders. In the extreme, for each success or failure, people may give credit or blame to a pastor as they perceive it. Their perceptions are often determined by the leader's relationship with them.

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Individual Relationships

The quality of relationships a pastor has with persons in the church is a major determinate of how much credibility he has. With better relationships, a pastor's reputation and current actions are likely to be viewed more favorably. And, with better relationships, a pastor is more likely to get things done. Thus, developing good relationships with others in a church is a key aspect of building credibility.

Building Credibility

Credibility is comprised of a mix of a pastor's accomplishments, situation, and relationships. While not much can be done about a pastor's situation, it can be improved as results are accomplished and relationships are built up. Since it takes good relationships to get things done, establishing good relationships is the foundation of building credibility.

Good relationships are developed when a pastor (1) spends time with others, (2) listens to other's ideas, (3) communicates clearly, and (4) does what he says he will do. Of course, other actions help build good relationships, but practicing these four ideas are a good start toward building trust between individuals.

Observations

Observation 1: New pastors often have little credibility. First, they have not had time to develop strong relationships. Second, they have not had time to accomplish anything.

Observation 2: Even if a pastor brings some credibility with him from a previous ministry, many people in the church take a wait-and-see attitude until the pastor does something in *their* church.

Observation 3: It often takes five to seven years in older churches for a new pastor to establish enough credibility to begin making major changes. Patience and wisdom are required for long-term success.

Observation 4: Doing a good job in successive ministry positions gives a pastor (or other leader) an increasing advantage when moving to a new position. Yet, credibility must be earned in every new place of service.

Observation 5: Building and maintaining credibility is a fluid concept that is never completely accomplished. The process does not end after one is established in a church or ministry, but continues to develop as relationships, accomplishments, and situations change.

How much credibility do you have in your ministry? How can you begin to build it or continue to build it stronger?

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