

GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Lead Yourself First!

What is the major challenge of every leader?

It is leading yourself!

Pastors can't lead until they've led themselves. What got them to where they are today, will not get them to where they want to be tomorrow.

In the concrete world, this means the truly faithful pastor never graduates but is a perpetual student. They know they must continually upgrade their knowledge, skills, and abilities on a regular basis.

It's true! Growing churches are led by growing pastors.

Five Reasons to Lead Yourself

First, people holding the position of pastor in today's or tomorrow's church find it necessary to upgrade their knowledge and skills on a regular and continuing basis. Once upon a time (like many mythological stories begin), a three- or four-year seminary or Bible college education prepared a pastor for a forty-year ministry career. The root of the

word seminary is from Latin *seminarium* meaning "seed bed." The idea is that a seminary education provides the seed that will grow into a life-long ministry. This was true for many years when life changed at a slower pace. In the rapid-paced, changing world that pastors function in today, it's not possible. Changes take place at breakneck speed. Each week, innovative technology emerges to challenge the way we relate, communicate, organize, and plan. The passive learner quickly falls behind. At best, today's seminary or Bible school education prepares pastors for ten years of ministry.

Remember: You must reeducate yourself every decade to stay current with life and ministry.

Second, you have to take responsibility for your own growth and development. It'd be helpful if your church took responsibility to

Put Dr. Gary L. McIntosh on
your church's research team.

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help you learn and grow. Regrettably, this rarely happens. While businesses spend billions of dollars a year to train and retrain their people, only the best-of-the-best churches invest any money in the training of their pastors. If you don't take responsibility for your own growth and development, likely no one will. Thus, ask yourself questions: Do I know what I'm doing? Do I have a sense of where I'm going? Do I feel out of touch with ministry today? Stop being passive about your own personal growth.

Remember: You can't shrink your way to leadership.

Third, the broader the range of your responsibilities, the more significant your continued training becomes. Although it's critical that continuing education be encouraged for children's pastors or youth pastors, it's doubly important that senior pastoral leaders keep learning, too. Lead pastors (senior or solo) regularly are bogged down wearing so many hats that they neglect their own development. Progress begins when you take time to invest in yourself.

Remember: You have to train up to stay up.

Fourth, you must have a deliberate self-improvement plan. Such a plan must include getting away from your church and ministry—the daily, weekly, and monthly routine—so you can stand back and view it from a wider and deeper perspective. You must plan and calendar your personal growth as thoughtfully as you do your normal work schedule. Such a plan isn't easy, and it takes self-discipline. Open your calendar right now. Are there scheduled appointments for your personal development? Do you see any scheduled interviews?

Remember: You won't improve until you have a personal improvement plan.

Fifth, you can't manufacture the desire to learn. The motivation for continual self-improvement must originate from inside yourself. No hodgepodge of learning techniques, books, blogs, or classes will take the place of your personal desire to learn, grow, and advance in your field of ministry. The pastor who can't motivate himself can't be motivated by any outside forces.

Remember: Leaders are learners!

So, what are you doing (or going to do) to keep growing and learning?

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