GROWTH POINTS

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

Create Some Heroes

Where have all the heroes gone?

It's a good question.

When I was younger, my heroes were Mickey Mantle and Theodore Roosevelt. As I grew older, my heroes were church leaders, like Win Arn and Donald McGavran, as well as some pastors who led the world's largest churches.

Heroes are difficult to find today. Our society likes to tear down its heroes. In days gone by, reporters protected our heroes by covering up their mistakes and inappropriate actions. Now, more and more people seem obsessed with exposing their errors. Much of this is good, of course. But, it makes it difficult to find heroes.

John Work, a business leader, reminds us that "heroes are the embodiment of a society's most fundamental and enduring values. They and their values serve as anchors in society. When heroes are absent, substitutes must be created." I believe one such creation are leaders.

Like heroes of the past, leaders-as-heroes must be able to embrace change and reinforce good values in the organizations they lead.

Where do leaders come from?

Over the last thirty-five years, I've studied leaders to discover how they became one. Or, to put it another way, What causes gave rise to leadership? I've found four different causes give rise to leadership and leaders.

Type one may be called the *crisis-need cause*.

Here, a crisis arises in a church or other organization. Someone notices the crisis and steps up to take charge of the situation. The person may never have thought of themselves as a leader, but they respond to the need of the moment and in doing so discovers an ability to lead others.

Type two may be called the *perceived-inequity cause*.

Here, an individual perceives an inequity among different groups of people. It might be differences related to gender, age, economics, ethnicity, or

other aspects of social life. Their response is to move into leadership to right a perceived wrong.

Type three may be called the *personal-challenge cause*.

Here, a leader offers a dynamic challenge to a wide audience to get involved. The challenge comes with a throw-them-up-against-the-wall-to-see-if-they-stick training. Some people respond to this emotional call and become effective leaders, but others flame out in discouragement.

Type four may be called the *search-for-excellence cause*.

Here, a leader communicates a clear vision of leadership development. The desire to raise up new leaders is tied to a strong vision of the future of the church or organization. A clear process of recruiting, training, deploying, and supporting new leaders is designed and implemented.

A Question

As you think about your church or organization, which of the four causes do you see at work? How were/are most leaders in your context discovered?

Type one (crisis-need) and type two (perceived-inequity) are two major drivers of leaders in today's culture.

Have you noticed any new people stepping up to help out in a crisis? Have you seen any new people taking charge to correct a social issue? These are future leaders. Connect with them and guide them to read good books on leadership. Invest in their training by sending them to classes or workshops to enhance their skills.

Type three (personal-challenge) is the weakest cause, but has been the go-to method in most churches and many other organizations. The weakness is not so much in the personal challenge, but in the lack of training. Simply throwing people up against the wall of leadership to see if they stick is a woefully ineffective means of leadership training. To be effective personal challenge must be combined with type four.

The most talked about cause is type four (search-for-excellence). However, for most churches and organizations it is more talked about than done. If you have a working leadership development plan, you are miles ahead of most other churches and organizations. Keep monitoring the results and make improvements every year. In time you'll have a process that develops leaders who will empower your mission to success.

As you identify new leaders, hold them up as heroes to the rest of the people in your church or organization. People aspire to imitate their heroes, and, in time, will embrace the attitudes, values, and practices of these leader-heroes.