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# GROWTH POINTS

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

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## Thinking about Leadership

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As ministry begins anew this year, it's a good time to think about the basics of leadership. Here are some insights to remember and build upon to improve your leadership in the year ahead.

*First, remember that people buy into you before they buy into your vision.*

Relationships are crucial for good leadership to take place. Your ability to establish relationships with people in the church is more important than your ability to manage budgets, start new programs, or develop and carry out a vision for future growth. Through the close scrutiny of face-to-face relationships, people discover your true character. Your fruitfulness will hinge on people seeing you as a genuine person who cares about others. As they buy into you, trusting you, they will buy into your vision for the future of their church.

*Second, confront your personal baggage.*

Each of us is human. We carry personal issues from our past into ministry. If needed, find a counselor who can help you process your feelings, hurts, and pains. The earlier you do this in your life, the less it will damage your ministry. If you haven't faced your personal demons, being a pastor will allow them emerge. You can be doing all the ministry stuff, but personal grief and loss from deep wounds surface creating tensions.

*Third, vision is caught not taught.*

Leading effectively happens through trusting relationships. As you live out your life in real time among real people in real life, people catch on to what you envision for the church's future. Start investing in people, and others will catch on to what you're doing and join you in making a difference in the church.

*Fourth, lead from the pack rather than the front.* Leadership takes place among the people rather than from out in front of them. While it's true that leaders have followers, this doesn't translate into always being in the front. True leadership emerges from the midst of the people. You can and should, of course, lead from the pulpit. Yet, leadership power from the pulpit is supported by the trust engendered from ministry among the people. When you stand with the people—supporting them, experiencing the same challenges—they will follow you.

*Fifth, lead the people not the organization.* God doesn't call you to DO

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leadership ON people, but to lead people. That's an entirely different calling. Remember: you're leading people not an organization, so focus on the people rather than the organization.

*Sixth, work with your church's structure, not against it.* You'll discover that most churches are structured to keep you from leading. Some churches have boards that see their purpose as keeping the pastor under control, rather than allowing them to lead. Romans 12:6-8 indicates gifts, like leadership, are to be celebrated, not limited. Are checks and balances good? Yes, So, begin by working within the structure that's in place, and change it as you go along.

*Seventh, listen more than talk.* Make your ministry 90% listening and 10% talking this year. What this means is avoid interrupting others and listen twice as hard. One trick to help you listen better is to write things down during a conversation. Doing so will keep you focused on what the other person is saying, as well as help you clarify what they're really saying. It also leads to better questions.

*Eighth, work at building a team.* If you want your church to grow, you'll need more leaders. Generally, your church will grow at a rate of ten people for every leader in the church. Find someone who shows evidence of being a leader and spend time with them. Invest in them. If you look for leaders,

you'll find them. Build a team who can help fulfill the vision of the church. Now, the lack of finances may keep you from hiring staff, but look around and find some people who can give you, say, three to five hours of time a week. Challenge them to be on your staff. Then work with those who respond to form a team.

*Ninth, redeem your loneliness.* You will experience loneliness. You won't be able to be as open, authentic, and vulnerable as you'd like. You can only share so much with your spouse, and they can only take so much, so find other pastors who can be real with you. Take them out for a meal and share concerns openly. You'll find wisdom, and maybe even a hug or two, that will make a difference.

*Tenth, Find a mentor.* You want someone who will lift you up when you're down, and take you down a notch when needed. Ideally, this person is older and more experience than yourself, so they can empathize with you. The person you want to mentor you is likely not looking for you. Step up and courageously ask them to help you, meet with you. Volunteer to pay for their help, or at least for dinner.

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Which of these leadership insights do you need to put into practice this year?

Which will you work on today?

Which will you prioritize this year?

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