

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

Volume 26 Issue 1

PO Box 892589, Temecula, CA 92589-2589

January 2014

Deal with Resistance

There is no progress without change and transition, and conflict results from both.

In truth it is not the changes that cause resistance to a church moving in a new direction, but rather the sense of loss experienced in the process. To revitalize any organization, something must be changed and something will be lost.

Take an inventory of the losses that worshipers will

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-Gary L. McIntosh

suffer in any proposed change. Watch for five different kinds of losses:

1. Loss of identity. People identify with the roles, positions, or places they occupy in the church. When these are changed, people sense a loss of identify, and some fight to retain it at all costs. Try to identify who will lose their identify, and see if you can place them into a new position where the resulting sense of loss will be mitigated.

2. Loss of control. People feel secure when they are in charge. As authority patterns are reconfigured during a time of revitalization, people become fearful. They make statements like, “I didn't ask for this.” They ask questions like, “What will they do next?” Give worshipers a sense of control by listening to their concerns and answering their questions.

3. Loss of meaning. People find personal meaning in places, programs, and patterns of life. Revitalization actions, such as relocation, removing old furniture, remodeling rooms, and other

activities, result in a loss of meaning for some. They ask, “Why is this happening to me?” and say, “I've attended this church for over twenty years, doesn't that count for anything?” Do everything possible to reassign old meanings to the new. For example, if relocating the church is necessary, take some item of meaning from the old church and place it prominently in the new.

4. Loss of belonging. People desire to see newcomers frequenting worship services, but sense loss when overwhelmed by numbers of people they no longer know. They say, “I don't even know the people sitting next to me in worship anymore.” Give worshipers permission to know only a few people (research has shown that most church members only

Check out Dr. McIntosh's new website for additional articles.

New website address:

www.churchgrowthnetwork.com

e-mail . . . cgnet@earthlink.net

write . . .

PO Box 892589

Temecula, CA 92589

What “sacred cows” are you facing?

Prepare to manage resistance and conflict.

know about sixty people by first name). Teach the importance of knowing a few well, such as class or small group members, but demonstrate that acquaintance with all church attendees is not necessary.

5. Loss of a future. People hope for a stable future, but struggle with the idea it is changing. They say, “I worked hard to become a board member. Now it seems I’m going to be pushed out.” Others comment, “We’re not visiting the elderly any longer. I hope the pastor doesn’t forget me when I’m in a nursing home.” Organize ways to care for people. Let everyone know that people are more important than programs.

Excellent leaders prepare to manage resistance and conflict. Some of the obstacles that rise up to create resistance are called “sacred cows.” A sacred cow is a program, ministry, or expectation that people hope to see repeated . . . for ever. The five common sacred cows that revitalization leaders need to be aware of are . . .

1. Unwritten Cows: Expectation that are not written down in any document, making it likely that a leader will get into trouble when one is unknowingly encountered. For example, that Mr. and Mrs. always direct the vacation Bible school.

2. Written Cows: Expectations or guidelines that are written into church documents. For example, only church members may use the sanctuary for weddings.

3. Turf Cows: the reality that certain people have rights of usage or oversight of certain programs or facilities. For example, the church secretary has the only key to the church office, it is her turf and no one else may use the copy machine, or anything else in the office, without her approval.

4. Denominational Cows: expectations or guidelines from the denomination. For example, only denominational education materials are to be used in the church.

5. Personal Cows: individual expectations of people attending the church. For example, the pastor should visit members, be available to anyone wishing counseling, pray at every church function, or a host of other expectations. There are almost as many personal cows as there are church attendees, which makes it difficult for pastors to carry on ministry in a pleasing manner.

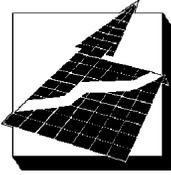
People in churches often sense a need for change. They recognize that things are not right, which may lead to their willingness to back the pastor in bringing about necessary changes. Unfortunately, it can also lead to increased resistance rather than revitalization if the feelings of loss are too great.

What are you doing to deal with potential resistance? What sacred cows are most visible? How can you prepare today for resistance tomorrow?



Adapted from *There’s Hope for Your Church* (Baker Books March (2013) by Gary L. McIntosh.

Growth Points is published twelve times a year. The subscription price is \$20 (Bank or World Money Order) per year. Permission is granted for use in a local church. For other reprint usage, advance permission must be obtained. Formerly published under the title *Church Growth Network*. Copyrighted 2014 ISSN 1520-5096



Ministry Insights for Church Leaders
P.O. Box 892589 Temecula, CA 92589-2589
www.churchgrowthnetwork.com

Gueterizing Your Church

Being nice to people is just the beginning of connecting newcomers to your church. Smiling and being nice accounts for only about twenty percent of connecting guests to a church.

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